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## COLUMN ONE

### Eh-oh! Can I have a terrorist for Christmas?

They have been accused of corrupting our under-fives by promoting hallucinogenic drugs and talking gobbledegook. Now those cuddlesome creatures, the Teletubbies, stand charged with consorting with Irish republican terrorists.

The latest and most surreal twist in the off-screen drama behind the children's television series came last weekend, when it emerged that La La, one of the characters, has joined the IRA.

His face has been grafted on to the image of an ArmaLite-wielding fighter, which appears on T-shirts being sold on the streets of nationalist West Belfast. They hear the slogan "Tíocfaidh Ár La La" which, without the second La, is Irish for "Our day will come".

It may be, though, that La La himself, together with Tinky Winky, Dipsy and Po, has already had his day.

The tantrums that will echo through thousands of households on Christmas morning, as small children learn that their parents have failed to track down one of the sought-after soft toys, could mark the last gasp in this hype-driven saga.

No matter that St Ivel is about to launch a licenced version of the Teletubbies' favourite food, pink custard, nor that plans are already afoot to

## PEOPLE



Loving embrace: Al and Tipper Gore bringing some romance to American politics

### 'Love Story' ends in tears for Al Gore

It was the perfect ruse for adding a touch of romance to a charisma-challenged Vice-President with higher ambitions, and for seven days it had all of Washington in a tizzy. Was it to take seriously Al Gore's claim, as reported by *Time* magazine last Monday, that he and his wife, Tipper, were the inspiration for Hollywood's most famous tearjerker, *Love Story*?

There were, after all, grounds for suspicion. Why had we not been fed this irresistible nugget before? Could it possibly have anything to do with the fact that Gore has suffered a string of political setbacks of late and is starting to worry about his prospects for filling Bill Clinton's shoes in 2001?

It was during a recent plane ride that Gore wandered into the press section and started reminiscing to *Time* reporter, Karen Tumulty. The Vice-President recollected making friends with Erich Segal, the author of *Love Story*, while he had been at Harvard in 1968. So did Tommy Lee Jones, who was Gore's roommate at Harvard and who, amazingly, went on to portray the roommate of the hero of the film.

But what caused all the excitement last week, was the notion that the film's central characters - Oliver Barrett IV, the wussy stud with a sensitive heart, played by Ryan O'Neal, and Jenny Cavalleri, the daughter of a baker who eventually dies, played by Ali MacGraw - had been directly inspired by Al and

Tipper. Yesterday, at last, word came from Segal himself, tracked down by a reporter with the *New York Times*. Poor Mr Gore. While his version of what happened was not all fairytale, it was not altogether accurate either. When Segal saw the *Time* story, he was, he said, "befuddled" by it.

Segal said that one element of the Barrett character was indeed drawn from Mr Gore - his blue-blooded family background and the pressure he was under to follow in his father's footsteps. (Gore's father was also a senator). But the most attractive side of Barrett - the mix of macho and sentimental - came not from him but from Tommy Lee Jones.

Mrs Gore, meanwhile, is out of the chain altogether. "I did not draw a thing from Tipper," Segal told the *Times*. "I knew her only as Al's date."

What damage the weeklong episode will do to Mr Gore is unclear. His press office is suggesting that Ms Tumulty may have read too much into the original plane-ride conversation. "The Vice-President never mis-spoke," a spokeswoman insisted at the weekend. "He may have been misheard."

If that was the case, why, one wonders, did the Vice-President let the story run unchallenged for a week? Perhaps because this press was just too good to knock down, even if it was only a quarter true.

— David Usborne, New York

### Clark sues over spoof diaries

Alan Clark, the Conservative MP whose published diaries convulsed the English political scene, begins a High Court action today over the London *Evening Standard's* weekly spoof of his lively diaries.

At an estimated four-day hearing in the Chancery Division, before Mr Justice Lingham, the former defence minister (pictured right) is set to accuse the paper of "passing off".

He claims that readers have been duped into believing that articles written under his name were penned by him, or at least with his permission, when the opposite was the case.

Effectively, he says that the paper is trading on his reputation by publishing "Alan Clark's Secret Political Diary" - which is written by Peter Bradshaw and always carries his byline beneath the supposed attribution to Mr Clark.

Mr Clark, who re-entered Parliament as MP for Kensington and Chelsea at the last election,



hogged the best-seller lists with his outrageous diaries which detailed his seductions and made generous side-swipes at friends and foes.

The newspaper column to which he has taken exception first appeared in the run-up to the election earlier this year. It adopted Mr Clark's unique style, reflecting both his aristocratic lifestyle at Saltwood Castle in Kent and his rakish reputation.

The newspaper is set to defend the action vigorously.

It maintains that the column is a "legitimate tease" and says that no-one in "their right minds" would think it was by Mr Clark.

### Lottery winners left wanting

Some people just never have enough, it seems. Even lottery millionaires cannot afford all the luxuries they desire.

Asked by the lottery operator, Camelot, about their jackpots, the millionaire winners claimed they did not have enough cash for everything they wanted.

Elaine Thompson, of Basingstoke, Hampshire, won £2.7m, but wants Donald Trump's apartment in New York which is on the market for £14m. Gary Ashmore, of Reading, Berkshire, who won £1.6m in June, said: "I would love to buy an entire airline and would call it Ashmore Airlines." While Bob and Anne Westland, of Alloa in Scotland, said their £3.8m was not enough for a private island in the sun.

But being a multi-millionaire does make life easier for some. Former assistant shop manager Karl Crompton, from Blackpool, who scooped £10.9m a year ago last May, admitted gratefully: "I have everything I've always wanted."

— Louise Jury

## UPDATE

### HEALTH

#### Women at risk from screening delays

Nearly 40 per cent of Britain's breast screening units are experiencing delays which could be putting women's health at risk. In some areas, women are having to wait up to six months longer than the recommended three year interval for screening, a survey by BBC's *Here and Now* programme found.

Professor Ciaran Woodman, director of public health at Christie Hospital, Manchester, says delays in screening increase the chance of a cancerous tumour going undetected until it is in the advanced stages. He is calling for the interval between screenings to be reduced from three to two years.

Professor Woodman said: "The aim of screening is to pick up new cancers. The longer you leave it between tests the greater the chance of not spotting a cancer until it is in its advanced stages. Our studies have shown that the risk of an interval cancer begins to rise dramatically after two years. So if we shorten the interval we reduce the risk of an interval cancer happening. If slippage is beyond three years, it should be a cause for concern for us all."

Under current guidelines, women between the ages of 50 and 64 are routinely invited for free breast screening on the NHS every three years. Women over 64 are also entitled to free screening, but have to ask for a mammogram through their GP. About one million women go for screening every year at 100 units around the UK.

### ENVIRONMENT



#### Cars loved more than environment

Government pleas to lure more people out of their cars and on to public transport appear to be falling on deaf ears, according to a survey out today. Only three in 10 people believe that more efficient trains, tubes and buses will mean fewer cars on the road, said the survey from vehicle inquiry service Equifax HPI.

Three in four motorists say they are against proposals to reduce the number of cars driven, the survey also showed. Also, more than 60 per cent of those questioned feel that the cost of using public transport prevents more people using it.

"Despite the Government's environmental concerns, it seems that we as a nation are more committed to our cars than the environment," said Equifax HPI managing director Tony Worby.

He went on: "When you consider that new car sales will be extremely high this year, it seems that the British public are more inclined to get behind the wheel, instead of getting on the bus."

### SOCIETY

#### Blacks 'denied fair deal at work'

Black people are not getting a fair deal at work even though they are just as well qualified as whites, according to a new report today. There are more young black people in full time education than white, while equal numbers of black and white people go on to higher education, the TUC study found.

But black people continue to be under represented in higher-paying jobs, suggesting that racial discrimination is continuing.

The TUC today launches a series of new posters showing the positive contribution black workers make to the economy which have been sent to offices and factories throughout the country.

### TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.41	Italy (lira)	2,798
Austria (schillings)	19.97	Japan (yen)	212.87
Belgium (francs)	58.71	Malta (lira)	0.62
Canada (\$)	2.30	Netherlands (guilders)	3.20
Cyprus (pounds)	0.83	Norway (kroner)	11.69
Denmark (kroner)	10.89	Portugal (escudos)	289.98
France (francs)	9.50	Spain (pesetas)	239.57
Germany (marks)	2.85	Sweden (kroner)	12.56
Greece (drachmai)	450.42	Switzerland (francs)	2.31
Hong Kong (\$)	12.44	Turkey (lira)	320.6401
Ireland (punts)	1.09	USA (\$)	1.61

Source: Thomas Cook  
Rates for indication purposes only

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## IN TOMORROW'S

## INDEPENDENT

**Julian Clary:**  
Too much of  
a bad thing  
THE EYE



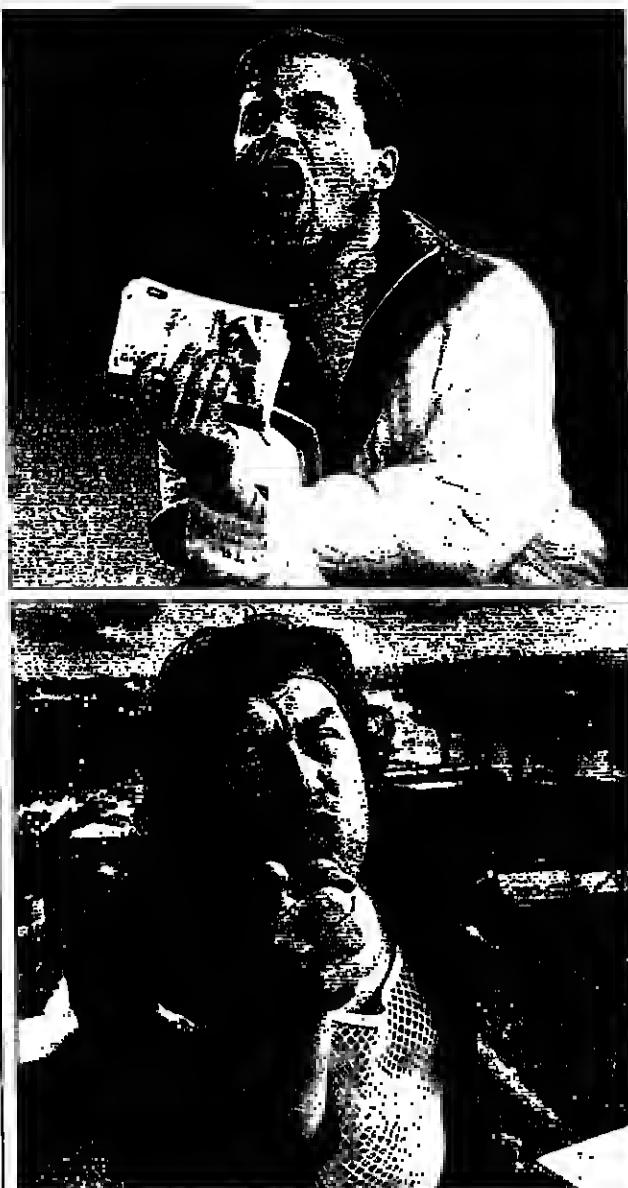
**Nina Simone:**  
The queen of  
world music  
THE EYE



**Games,  
CD-Roms and  
techno treats**  
NETWORK+



Patsy and Edina qualify for classes two and one respectively, Loadsamoney makes it in to class four, and Rab C Nesbit is in the underclass



## She looks down on him, he looks up to her, and the underclass will always know its place

Who has what job remains the key to social class, say government statisticians. David Walker explains that who gives the orders at work will become the basis for dividing us up for official purposes.

A working party of sociologists and statisticians today publishes a classification scheme which, for the first time, officially recognises the existence of an "underclass".

The new scheme will reshape the way the Government collects data from the public, and the amounts of money paid out in grants to schools, hospitals and councils. Government definitions also affect the way market research companies operate, along with the decisions of insurance companies and building societies about policies and loans.

The report, from the Economic and Social Research Council to the Office for National Statistics, says firmly that class still matters in modern

Britain, and that work remains the most important source of differentiation.

It dismisses the idea that people are nowadays less socially distinguishable, for example in terms of what they eat, what they wear and where they shop. It says people's place in the pecking order is vitally affected by whether they give orders or take them.

But in place of the old Registrar-General's social classes, which has been large-

ly unchanged since the 1920s, the new ladder has more rungs. Instead of the old social classes IV and V, partly-skilled and unskilled occupations, the statisticians are creating separate classes for those employed in "routine jobs" (which include truck drivers and traffic wardens) and those in "elementary occupations" (waiters and cleaners, for example).

A new separate class is proposed for the long-term un-

employed and those who have never worked. It is recent growth in this latter group which made the old classification redundant.

"Many were excluded, including large numbers of those who are retired, long-term sick, disabled and not in employment, unemployed or never employed," says the report. Although Labour inherits this work from the previous administration, it fits well with the new government's social pol-

icy priorities, especially welfare to work. The new class definitions should allow easier targeting of communities where the "socially excluded" live, and easier measurement of its own success in getting unemployed and disabled people off the dole and into employment. It also chimes with Labour's emphasis on the central position of work in people's lives.

"Social class," says Professor David Rose of the University of Essex, who co-ordinated the study, "needs to be defined in terms of production, of where and how people are employed. It may sound old-fashioned but work is what matters. It also matters whether you are an employer or an employee."

He cited a recent study of civil servants, which showed that stress-related illness, disability and early retirement on grounds of health affected lower grade workers far more than top mandarins. The sociologists say occupation is closely linked with health, and class correlations still exist between parents' job and children's educational attainment and success in life.

### THE NEW CLASS DIVISIONS

The new classes Class 1: Professionals and senior managers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, fund managers, executive directors, professors, editors, managers (with more than 25 staff under them), top civil servants  
Class 2: Associate professionals and junior managers, Nurses, social workers, estate agents, lab technicians, supervisors, managers with fewer than 25 staff under them, journalists, entertainers, actors.  
Class 3: Intermediate occupations, Sales managers, secretaries, nursery nurses, computer operators, stage hands.  
Class 4: Self employed non professionals, Driving instructors, builders.  
Class 5: Other supervisors, craft jobs, plumbers, telephone fitters.  
Class 6: Routine jobs, Lorry drivers, assembly line workers.  
Class 7: Elementary jobs, Labourers, waiters, cleaners.  
Class 8: Unemployed.

The old class divisions. I Professionals II Managerial and technical III Skilled jobs a) non manual b) manual IV Partly-skilled occupations V Unskilled occupations

## On-line shopping for all, urges think-tank

With half of all shopping forecast to be done electronically in less than 20 years, we are on the brink of a 'trading revolution'. A new report suggests that by government and technology working together, cheap, high-quality goods can be available for all at the push of a button. Glenda Cooper, Social Affairs Correspondent, reports.

Susan wants someone to look after her children for the afternoon, so she switches on her interactive TV and goes to the childcare page where she can select a police-vetted childminder.

Before she goes out, however, she needs to mow the lawn, so she turns to another page which informs her of mowers to hire nearby, the cheapest rates and availability of delivery.

Meanwhile, up the road in Stockport, three couch drivers have got together in lease a 52-seater bus which they operate around the Manchester area. Potential passengers can book tickets through their computer where the drivers advertise the times of journeys.

Sounds like an impossible dream? According to the think tank Demos this could all become reality in the next couple of decades as teleshopping becomes the norm.

Next autumn, British Interactive Broadcasting, part owned by Rupert Murdoch's News International, launches in Britain offering fully-fledged home shopping at the touch of

a button. However, Demos argues that the Government must help set up what it calls "guaranteed electronic markets" (GEMs) or "people's marketing" which will ensure that the disadvantaged are not excluded from this trading revolution. At present, teleshopping stands to benefit big companies with well known brands, large databases and the funds to afford the steep start-up costs.

GEMs, however, would be set up as a collaboration between the Government and the private sector, establishing a central computer running thousands of "marketplaces" - like teleshopping systems in which anyone can buy or sell.

The GEM would include a standard contract to make deals such as hiring a childminder or buying a ticket legally binding, and would make sure that people had been vetted.

For example, when Susan wants a childminder she would switch on her interactive TV and go to the childcare site. Selecting daycare, she specifies the time for which her two children need to be looked after. The system calculates the lowest price for that in her area.

All childminders registered have to have police clearance and have been vetted. Susan can look at how many times the carer has been hired, if there are any complaints made against her and at her qualifications. If Susan wants to hire the carer, she clicks on the contract page where a legally-binding contract is laid out.

The author of the report, Wingham Rowan, says that the Government, by setting up the GEMs, would prevent people becoming excluded from the benefits of electronic trading by opening up a huge market-

place for small business and sole traders.

"We stand on the brink of an electronic revolution as momentous as the information revolution," said Mr Rowan. "This could have huge social and economic costs unless steps are taken to include everyone - from the affluent and technologically literate to the marginalised and disadvantaged."

"Setting up GEMs offers new ways to harness electronic trading so that it provides benefits for everyone not just an elite. If the true economic and social potential of electronic commerce is to be liberated, government must play a leading role."

Guaranteed electronic markets: the backbone of a twenty first century economy? by Wingham Rowan is available from Demos, 9 Bridwell Place, London EC4V 6AP. £14.95 plus 60p p&p

## Only one in 400 police complaints lead to punishment

The debate over police disciplinary procedures looks set to heighten, with the revelation that less than one per cent of complaints against police ever translate into punishment. Our reporter investigates whether Britain's police are unimpeachable - or simply above the law.

EXCLUSIVE  
BY JOJO  
MOYES

Only one police officer received disciplinary action for every 382 police officers against whom complaints were made last year, Home Office figures have revealed.

Between 1996 and 1997, almost 10,000 complaints involving the Metropolitan Police, and more than 36,000 involving officers across England and Wales, were made and completed. Of those figures, 20 Metropolitan police officers and 102 across England and Wales received disciplinary action.

The figures were revealed in a written answer from Home Office Minister Alan Michael to Kevin McNamara, Labour MP for Hull North. Mr McNamara, who said he was "shocked" by the figures, is to write to the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, to draw his attention to the ratio of completed complaints to disciplinary action against officers.

"I would like to think that it shows what a fine, upstanding body of men and women they are, but I think it says something more about the way complaints against police are investigated," Mr McNamara said.

The figures look set to fuel increasing criticism, even from within the forces themselves, that police disciplinary procedures are inadequate.

In a speech last month, Met-

ropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Paul Condon reiterated this point to MPs and repeated his allegation that up to 250 officers at Scotland Yard were corrupt.

The Commissioner also noted the large number of officers under investigation who go sick. Many internal inquiries are halted without proof of wrongdoing when the accused officers take retirement on health grounds. In 1995-6, more than 70 per cent of officers facing investigation retired on medical grounds.

A Police Complaints Authority spokesman said the disparity between the complaints made and officers disciplined could be explained by a number of factors. "There is often a disparity between those complaints made and those we are able to investigate fully. The Home Office would record all the complaints, including minor complaints which would not be investigated formally," he said.

He added: "Often complaints fall down because they are withdrawn. An awful lot of people drop out; often the complaint is made when someone is very angry. They'll then think better of it and change their mind."

In many other cases, he said, the complainant would not cooperate with an investigation, or refuse to respond to letters.

But there are other reasons why a complaint may not result in punishment for the officer concerned. Disciplinary proceedings against police officers have to attain a level of proof far higher than is the case in other occupations. To save embarrassment, many are simply offered early retirement.

Similarly, police forces have the power to prevent any investigation into their activities simply by refusing to record the complaint. Where a complaint is referred to the PCA, it is examined by another police force. Labour MP Chris Mullin, chairman of the Commons Home Affairs Committee, which is investigating police disciplinary and complaints procedures, said: "It's widely recognised that the existing complaints and discipline procedures are not satisfactory and that there are many obstacles in the way of dealing effectively with the small minority of officers who are either corrupt or who misbehave."

"Our report is likely to suggest some robust ways of overcoming these difficulties."

POLICE COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINE 1996-97		
	Metropolitan Police	England and Wales
Total complaints completed	9,919	36,731
Officers charged with disciplinary offence as a result of a complaint	36	141
Officers receiving disciplinary action as a result of a complaint	20	102

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Up to £10,000	4.65	3.72
£10,000+	4.89	3.91
£25,000+	5.37	4.29
£50,000+	5.85	4.68
Private Banking Savings Account (annual interest option)		
Up to £10,000	4.75	3.80
£10,000+	5.00	4.00
£25,000+	5.50	4.40
£50,000+	6.00	4.80
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£5,000+	4.67	3.73
£10,000+	4.91	3.92
£25,000+	5.40	4.32
£50,000+	5.87	4.69

Gross: the rate before the deduction of tax applied to interest on savings. Net: this is the annual rate of interest after the deduction of tax applied to interest on savings.

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## TV watchdog bans world-debt crisis commercial



Stills from the commercial by Christian Aid, which highlights Third World debt 'madness' and which the ITC found to be in breach of its code of standards and practice; the advertisement was to have been broadcast from the New Year

A television commercial highlighting the human impact of the Third World debt burden has been banned by advertising watchdogs. The charity Christian Aid, which wants public debate in advance of the G8 industrialised nations' discussion of the debt crisis next year, is surprised. Louise Jury reports.

A commercial due to be shown from the New Year is in breach of the Independent Television Commission's (ITC) code of standards and practice, it has been ruled.

The Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre has refused Christian Aid permission to broadcast a 60-second and a 40-second advertisement which calls for the Third World debt 'madness' to be cancelled.

Andrew Simms, from Christian Aid, said yesterday: "It seems an absurd situation when you can advertise nuclear power

stations [and] the Spice Girls... but you can't raise an issue that thousands of lives depend on."

The advertisement is a story of two debt collectors who are seen taking a needle from a nurse as she is about to inoculate a black baby. They leave with a haul including milk and the baby's blanket.

Mr Simms said that across sub-Saharan Africa, there were countries which were spending more servicing their debts to the Western powers than their health and edu-

cation budgets combined. Children were being deprived of their future by the debts which were often old and being paid to regimes which could afford to do without the repayments, he claimed. "This advert shows the human side [of the debt crisis]."

Article number 10 of the ITC code says: "No advertisement may be inserted by or on behalf of any body whose objects are wholly or mainly of a political nature, and no advertisement may be directed towards any political end. No advertisement may

show partiality as respects matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy."

But Christian Aid believed the commercial would not fall foul of regulations because it points the finger at no particular government or organisation. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and most governments agree there is a major problem.

The G8 group of industrialised nations is due to meet in Birmingham in May. The

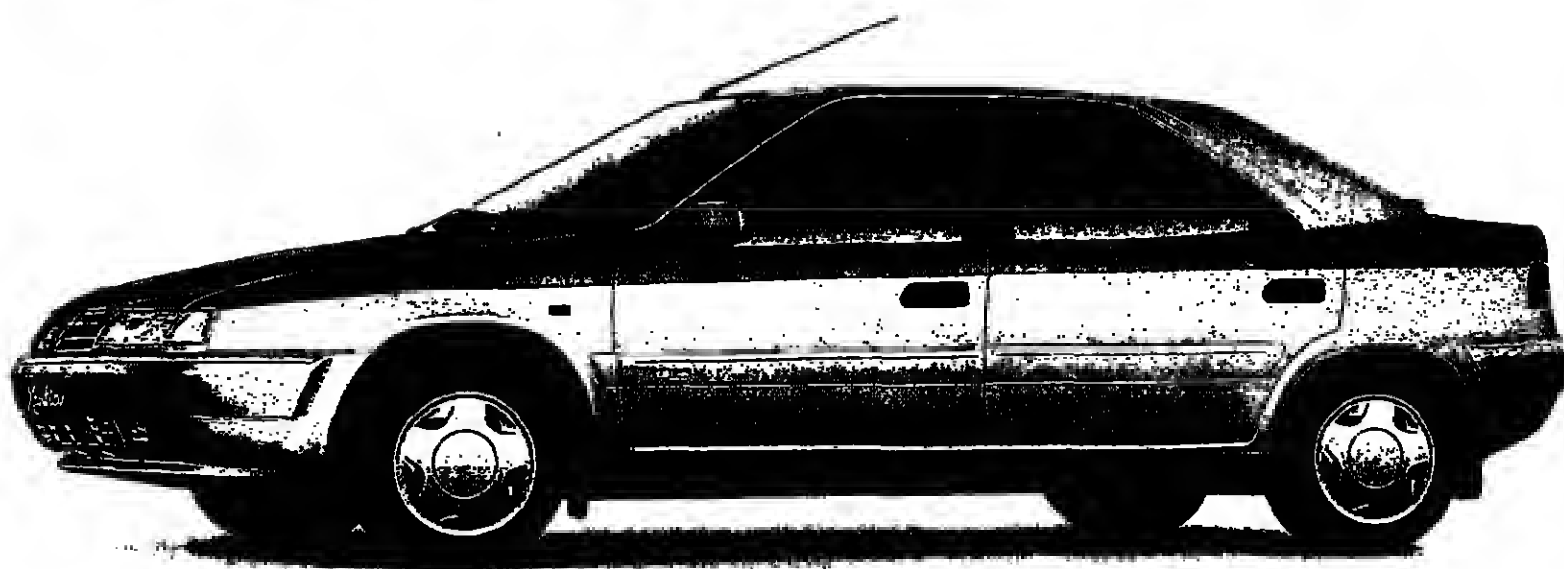
charity said they wanted to stimulate debate before then.

"If anybody is in a position to do something about it, they are," Mr Simms said. But a spokesman for the Broadcast Advertising Clearance Council, which examines advertisements on behalf of the ITC, said the advertisement was in breach of the code.

He would not explain why, but said it could be the treatment of the subject rather than the subject matter itself.

 CITROËN

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\*PRICE IS CORRECT AT TIME OF GOING TO PRESS. CAR SHOWN LIMITED EDITION CITROËN XANTIA 1.6 16V TEMPTATION 2 SALOON £12,740 ON THE ROAD. XANTIA TEMPTATION 2 TURBO DIESEL SALOON £13,895 ON THE ROAD. XANTIA TEMPTATION 2 ESTATE PRICES FROM £13,895 ON THE ROAD. ON THE ROAD PRICES INCLUDE EGCT FOR VAT, DELIVERY, NUMBER PLATES AND TWELVE MONTHS ROAD FUND LICENCE. LIMITED EDITION MODELS SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY.

### Glasgow taps still cut off

More than 50,000 people in the north of Glasgow without water since last Wednesday after a diesel spill contaminated supplies, still do not know when normal service will be resumed. Some reports suggested that a phased reconnection of tap water to homes in the north of Glasgow would begin today, but it now looks as though this will happen later in the week.

West of Scotland Water said that "significant progress" had been made in its attempts to remove diesel from water served by the Burncrooks treatment works at Drymen, near Loch Lomond. The Scottish Office announced said on Saturday that an independent investigation would be held to examine the cause of the emergency and the water firm's management of it.

### Interpol joins hunt for rapist

The hunt for Britain's most wanted serial rapist has turned international. West Yorkshire Police have called in Interpol to help locate suspects in Australia, Holland, Gibraltar and France.

The suspects are among almost 7,000 men still to be eliminated in the hunt for a rapist who has struck five times since

1982. Last June, police launched Operation Lynx and revealed the same man was responsible for abducting and sexually assaulting women in Leicestershire, Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. The man is white, at least 35, 5ft 8ins and uses the phrase "lass" or "lassie" to his victims.

### Two win £4m each in lottery

Two ticket holders shared Saturday night's £8.1m National Lottery jackpot. The winning numbers were 4, 30, 32, 14, 3, 11 and the bonus number was 46.

### DAILY POEM

#### Fire-Jottings

By Tomas Tranströmer, translated by Robin Fulton

Throughout the dismal months my life sparked alive only when I made love with you.

As the firefly ignites and fades out, ignites, and fades out, - in glimpses we can trace its flight in the dark among the olive trees.

Throughout the dismal months the soul lay shrunken, lifeless, but the body went straight to you. The night sky bellowed. Stealthily we milked the cosmos and survived.

Today's poem comes from Bloodaxe's edition of *New Collected Poems* (£9.95), by Tomas Tranströmer, Sweden's most important living poet, who has published 11 collections since 1954. His work has been translated into more than 40 languages.

### ADULT MELTUS EXPECTORANT WITH DECONGESTANT

#### IMPORTANCE NOTICE TO CONSUMERS AND RETAILERS (BATCH NUMBER - 1197P187)

Seton Healthcare Group plc in the UK is taking the precautionary measure of recalling packs of ADULT MELTUS EXPECTORANT WITH DECONGESTANT following the discovery that the incorrect grade of alcohol was used in its manufacture. Only a small number of bottles have been sold and this can only be done under a Pharmacist's supervision.

#### WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

- If you have purchased ADULT MELTUS EXPECTORANT WITH DECONGESTANT, check for code 1197P187. This will be located both on the bottom of the carton and on the label of the bottle in the bottom right hand corner.
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## Hospitals offer lucky dip in post-surgery pain control

Choosing the right hospital for your operation can dramatically reduce the pain you suffer as a result. **Jeremy Lorraine, Health Editor, examines a major report into anaesthetic services in the National Health Service.**

Most patients believe pain is unavoidable after surgery. But an investigation by the Audit Commission, the official National Health Service watchdog, to be published

this week, shows that there are wide differences between hospitals. It found that where you have the surgery is as important as the kind of operation in determining the amount of pain you suffer.

A study of hernia patients, conducted as part of the commission's investigation, found "significant variations" among hospitals in the proportion of patients who suffered "moderate" or "severe" pain. About 80,000 hernias are carried out each year and it is one of the commonest operations performed on the NHS.

Patients in hospitals with acute pain

teams - staff specially trained in techniques to deal with it - had the least pain but only 57 per cent of hospitals have such teams. More than one in three hospitals do not bother to assess patients' pain regularly on all surgical wards.

The report, "Anaesthesia Under Examination", also found that there has been no reduction in overall levels of pain experienced by NHS patients over the past 25 years, despite advances in treatment and drugs.

Dr Chris Glynn, consultant anaesthetist at the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS

Trust and author of a 1995 survey of pain services in hospitals, said: "Pain is the worst taught and worst managed subject in medical school. In hospitals, medical staff measure blood pressure and temperature and a whole range of other things, but they don't measure pain."

Pain can be measured simply by asking patients to mark a point on a scale ranging from no pain to severe pain. Nurses then provide painkillers and can vary their strength according to whether subsequent measurements show the pain growing or reducing. "This has been shown to be the

single most important way of reducing pain - by getting staff to measure it," Dr Glynn said.

The Audit Commission study, which also covers pain control in childbirth and for people with chronic conditions, shows that the likelihood of finding a hospital with an acute pain team varies widely around the country. In the North Thames region, covering north London and the home counties, almost 75 per cent of hospitals have the teams; but in the South Thames region, covering south London, Kent and Surrey, fewer than half do.

Anaesthetists warned, however, that pain is subjective and the same operation by the same surgeon with the same anaesthetist can leave one patient doubled up while another is pain-free.

One consultant said: "The simplest way to deal with pain is to render the patient largely unconscious but you don't want them to breathe less because then they get pneumonia. There is a limit to how much pain you can get rid of, or would want to."

The Royal College of Anaesthetists declined to comment on the Audit Commission report in advance of its publication.

## How perfect teeth cost £1,000 to fix

A journalist posing as a patient who visited 25 dentists round the country found some who said he had nothing wrong with his teeth, while others suggested more than £1,000-worth of treatment. **Jeremy Lorraine asks if such variations are inevitable.**

It is a well-tried trick and the results are always startling. Send a journalist "undercover" to dentists across the country to see what treatment they recommend and how much it will cost.

In the latest survey of this kind, published today in *Reader's Digest*, the "patient" found one dentist who said he needed nothing more than a scale and polish, while another suggested three fillings, extraction of a wisdom tooth and the replacement of four crowns costing more than £1,000.

Both these were private dentists in Swansea, West Glamorgan. Another private dentist, in London, recom-

mended one filling and one crown at a cost of £430.

Sticking with the NHS did not guarantee cheaper treatment. One NHS dentist in Birmingham suggested five fillings and replacing a crown at a cost of £413.

Before starting on his travels, the journalist, Tony Dawe, had a check-up from his own dentist and two professors of dental health. All three said he needed no treatment other than a scale and polish.

Dentists have an incentive to treat because the more they do the more they are paid. Mr Dawe concludes: "Dentistry is a stunningly inexact science. Even though I had expected that dentists would have different, yet valid, opinions. I was not prepared for the astounding variations in diagnoses."

The British Dental Association said a survey of any profession would reveal differences of opinion.

A spokeswoman said: "Sending a patient on a tour of dentists is an artificial test because what is appropriate treatment for a regular attendee might not be for someone coming for the first time."



Open house: Dentists' diagnoses vary across the country, as do their charges

Photograph: Nicholas Turpin

## NHS pays dear for cost-cutting body

The NHS Supplies Authority, set up to cut costs, has been severely criticised by a Commons committee after it was revealed that running costs outstripped any savings made.

In the first four years of its operations as a central buying agency for hospitals in England, NHS Supplies saved the health service £264m. But the Commons Committee of Public Accounts has been told that the authority has total annual running costs of £70m - or £280m over four years.

David Davis, the former Tory minister who chairs the committee that monitors Whitehall efficiency and effectiveness, said: "NHS Supplies operates in a sector where funds are scarce and every pound must be spent to maximum effect. It was set up to save the NHS money, and to date it is clearly failing."

"Progress in establishing a single organisation has been too slow. It is unacceptable that there is no consistency in prices paid and 'mark-ups' charged by NHS Supplies."

In evidence, MPs were told that in the early years of the authority, trusts in the South and

West of England were being charged £26 for delivering a box of surgical gauze, while only £4 was charged for the same service in North Thames Anglia region.

MPs were assured last year that such charging differentials no longer existed. They were also told that more than half of all trust chief executives were unhappy with the authority's prices and its value for money.

But the authority's chief executive told the committee: "We took over a pretty unholly mess. What we have done is to transfer that into something which is already very, very significantly better."

In spite of their low rating for the authority, trust chief executives were still using NHS Supplies because it was better than the alternative, he added.

One MP commented that the organisation was a "funny animal"; while another said it was a "monster".

● *NHS Supplies in England. First Report of Public Accounts Committee. Commons paper, 349; Session 1997-98; Stationery Office; £8.*

— Anthony Bevins

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# 6/POLITICS

## Robinson suggested share deal to family's offshore trust

Geoffrey Robinson, the beleaguered Treasury Minister, was yesterday accused of being economical with the truth over the conduct of an offshore trust. With John Prescott hinting at hypocrisy, Anthony Bevis, Political Editor, says the Prime Minister might yet have to let him go.

In a lawyer's letter, threatening action for defamation against the *Observer* last Monday, it was stated on behalf of Mr Robinson, Paymaster General, that his family's offshore Orion Trust - of which he is a discretionary beneficiary - "act entirely independently of him and are not controlled, or their decisions influenced, by him in any way". Yesterday, it was revealed

that Mr Robinson had been involved in discussions with Orion before the trustees had gone on to buy £10m worth of shares in TransTec, the engineering company he founded, and £8m worth of shares in Coventry City Football Club.

Peter Lilley, the shadow Chancellor, said last night: "His claim that he did not influence the Orion Trust 'in any way' has been shown to be false."

He added: "Over the past few days, it has become clear that the Paymaster General has been economical with the truth in public statements about his personal financial arrangements."

But in a statement last night, Mr Robinson said his position had been vindicated, and he added: "I am a millionaire and I am delighted also to be a businessman who is a minister in a Labour government, and I now want to get on with my job in the Treasury of helping to build a more successful economy."



Lap of luxury: Geoffrey Robinson, Labour's millionaire Paymaster General, dismissed attacks as 'smears and mud'

Photograph: David Rose

Mr Lilley said: "We still don't know all the facts. But it is clear that Geoffrey Robinson no longer retains a shred of credibility. If he will not now resign, the Prime Minister must

dismiss him." The possibility of that being forced was increased yesterday when the Deputy Prime Minister appeared in back charges of hypocrisy against his ministerial colleague.

Mr Prescott told the BBC television programme *Breakfast with Frost*: "I notice a number of the papers sort of saying he hasn't done anything wrong. You may argue that the politi-

cian said one thing, perhaps done another; that seems to be the greatest charge against him."

But Mr Robinson told the *Sunday Express*: "What is hypocrisy? Hypocrisy is saying

one thing and doing another. I haven't condemned offshore trusts, but I've made it clear that whatever government policy is, I will follow it."

Mr Robinson, who put his personal wealth at £30m, dismissed the attacks as "smears and mud". He said he had paid about £1.4m in income tax over the last five years; he paid all his taxes in the UK; and the idea that he was "dodging tax is a bit rich".

He told the *Observer*: "I have many faults, but hypocrisy is not one of them." Last week's demand for an apology, under threat of libel action, appeared

to have been forgotten. The Tories, however, will now be getting their teeth into two fresh pieces of meat - Mr Robinson's behind-the-scenes involvement in two Orion transactions, and the definition of "influence".

On the TransTec transaction, Mr Robinson told the *Express*: "A rights issue was being done and it was very important for the company. I told them I didn't have ten million quid - ready - there and then for them. They asked me would I approach ... they knew I had a family trust, would I mention it to the trust to see if they were interested."

He told the *Observer*: "So I suggested to the trust, 'Are you interested in looking at this?' It would be helpful to the family. It would be perverse of them not to look at it. They are charged to do things beneficially for the family, even if it is at their entire discretion."

For the purchase of the Coventry City FC shares, it was reported in yesterday's *Sunday Times* that Mr Robinson had telephoned Derrick Robins, the former club chairman, saying he wanted to buy Mr Robins's 10,619 shares. Mr Robins agreed, and at the end of January the shares were bought by a Guernsey company which acts for Orion. Mr Robinson insists, however, that he has done nothing wrong and nothing illegal.

## Labour and BBC in new bust-up

Labour stepped up its war of nerves against the BBC yesterday after the presenter of a radio programme told listeners that the party had "withdrawn co-operation" because Harriet Harman, Secretary of State for Social Security, had not been available for interview.

Instead, the Government fielded John Denham, a junior minister, to answer questions about the review of disability and sickness benefits.

Last week, in a leaked exchange of correspondence between David Hill, Labour's director of communications, and Jon Barton, editor of the *Today* programme, Mr Hill disclosed that the party had held a "council of war" over the treatment meted out to Ms Harman by John Humphrys.

Mr Hill warned that if interviewers continued to interrupt ministers, blocking out the message, they faced the risk of the party refusing to supply

ministers to the programme.

Yesterday, the row grew when James Cox, presenter of *The World This Weekend*, said Labour had "apparently withdrawn co-operation from us because Ms Harman declined to come in to talk to me".

But Mr Hill protested: "They know that that assertion is ridiculous. The question of which social security minister goes on their programme is a matter for the department, not the Labour Party, and *The World This Weekend* know it ... The Labour Party will be forced by this action to exercise rigid demarcation so that we can only assist the BBC with bids which are strictly party political. That is the inevitable outcome if the BBC persist in acting in this way."

A spokesman for *The World This Weekend* said Mr Cox's remark had been intended as "light-hearted" and was "not meant to be taken seriously".

— Anthony Bevis



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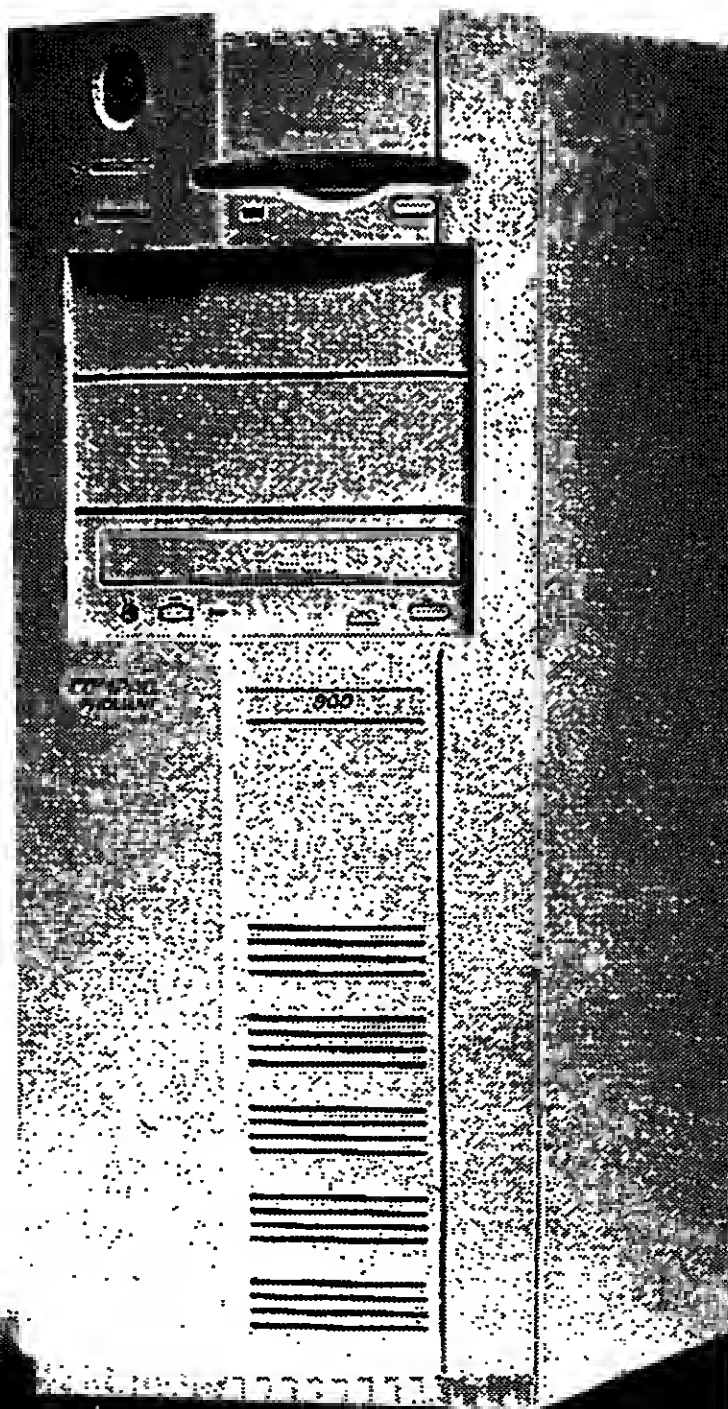
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## Cosmic signs say 'we may not be alone'

Stars close to our own also have planets orbiting them, British and American scientists have discovered. It may mean our place in the universe is less special - but it also increases the chances of finding life out there. *Charles Arthur, Science Editor, on the latest findings from a new telescope.*

The medieval astronomer Copernicus took us away from the centre of the universe, insisting the Earth orbits the Sun, not vice-versa. And successive cosmological discoveries have made us seem less important.

Now, British scientists at the Royal Observatory in Edinburgh have made new observations that make our solar system seem even less unusual: they have found other stars which have groups of planets orbiting them. But that also means that we are less likely to be alone, since such planets are ideal settings for life to start.

Investigating four young stars - Beta Pictoris, Fomalhaut, Epsilon Eridani and Vega - which all lie less than a hundred light years from Earth, they found that there were haloes around the central star, and circular areas apparently swept clear of dust. One of the best examples is Fomalhaut which lies 22 light years from our sun. In cosmic terms, it's next door.

This pattern of haloes fits the predicted way that a sun and solar system would form from a diffuse interstellar cloud of gas and dust.

Matter begins to fall towards the centre as the cloud collapses through its own gravity; this will also tend to make the cloud spin. Over time, the matter and gas at the centre compresses into a star which achieves enough density to begin fusion. Meanwhile some of the dust around it has enough rotational momentum to keep orbiting, and form proto-planets, whose gravity attracts wandering dust as they enlarge - eventually leaving planets, and empty space between them.

One of the strongest predictions of this idea is that all the planets should orbit our sun in the same direction. And they do. The difference between these four stars and our own sun is age. While our sun is about half way through its 10-billion-year life, these are only about 200 million years old.

"Our solar system probably looked like this 4 billion years ago: A halo of dust with planets orbiting inside it," said Professor Glenn White of Queen Mary and Westfield College in London. All that is then needed is for life to start - a process which scientists argue could either be caused by "seed chemicals" from passing comets, or by chemical reactions which catalyse themselves to create more complex molecules.

The new results were obtained using a £1m camera called Scuba - sub-millimetre common user bolometry array - which is able to detect incredibly small heat emissions from distant objects. It is so sensitive that it has to be cooled almost to absolute zero, -273C, and mounted on a telescope 14,000 feet up in the unpolluted mountain air of Hawaii.



Online: Chelsea Pensioners making free telephone calls yesterday courtesy of Merrill Lynch, the City investment bank Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid

## Riots obstruct path to peace in Ulster

The Northern Ireland peace process took two steps back with rioting in Londonderry at the weekend, and one tentative pace forward with speculation that Unionists might agree to meet Sinn Féin. *David McKitterick, Ireland Correspondent, reports.*

While the possibility of an encounter between David Trimble, the Ulster Unionist leader, and

Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams remains conjecture, the weekend rioting in Londonderry came as a reminder that relations among nationalists, Unionists and the RUC are in many areas poor.

As so often, the outbreak of rioting followed a controversial loyalist march in Londonderry city on Saturday. Weeks of sensitive negotiations involving loyalists, nationalists, the police and others failed to maintain order as more than 1,000 petrol bombs were thrown, mainly at the police, by nationalist rioters. Police replied with 169 plas-

tic bullets; 13 arrests were made while five police officers were injured, none of them seriously. The worst injury was sustained by an 11-year-old boy hit on the head with a stone, whose condition was described as ill but stable.

Much damage was done by fires started by petrol-bombs. Police said yesterday that the violence was planned and directed by "a small extreme group planning provocation, confrontation and violence". The authorities will be hoping the incident localised. Meanwhile, in an interview

on Irish television, Mr Trimble appeared to temper his normally forthright condemnation of Sinn Féin. Asked about a meeting with Gerry Adams he replied: "So many things are possible. We have seen actually in the past people who have forsaken terrorism and genuinely changed into democrats. ... It is perfectly possible that Gerry Adams can follow that path. And in that sense, I do not rule this out. It is possible."

Since it has been more than half a century since Unionist and republican leaders met, such an encounter would be a

momentous one. But the weekend also brought much more negative comments from Unionist sources, so that such a ground-breaking meeting may remain unlikely in the short term.

Mr Adams has repeatedly suggested such a meeting, renewing his calls after his meeting with Tony Blair in Downing Street this week. In Belfast today the multi-party talks resume, with both London and Dublin anxious to achieve some movement before their Christmas recess.

## Censor role for ex-editor

The founding editor of *The Independent*, Andreas Whittam Smith, is to become president of the British Board of Film Classification and will spearhead a shake-up of the organisation, which has been criticised for relaxing standards on violence and sex in videos.

Mr Whittam Smith's appointment is expected to be announced on Thursday by Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, who has blocked the promotion of Lord Birkett, 68, one of two BBFC vice-presidents, to succeed Lord Harewood, the retiring president.

The board has been lambasted for a series of decisions, including the awarding of an 18 certificate to the feature film *Crash*, which linked sexual gratification to car accidents.

Mr Straw is said to have lost patience with the BBFC after finding out last summer that guidelines on the classification of sex videos had been unilaterally relaxed. This meant that videos that customs officers would normally seize were freely available in rental shops.

The first task facing Mr Whittam Smith will be to find a successor to James Ferman, the controversial American-born director who is retiring after 22 years.

The revamped board is set to undergo a change in culture, moving away from the secrecy that has traditionally surrounded its decisions to become more accountable to ministers and the general public.

Mr Straw's refusal to endorse the promotion of Lord Birkett came as a surprise. Home secretaries have the right to veto appointments to the board, a private body funded by the film industry, but internal candidates are usually rubberstamped.

— Kathy Marks

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# 8/FARMING

## Stay-at-home lambs eat away profits

Farmers' reputation for moaning doesn't help them a time of genuine difficulty. But is the crisis as bad as they claim? Stephen Goodwin, Heritage Correspondent, listened to farmers' complaints as sheep prices follow beef into the depths.

Les Armstrong knew the lamb crisis was here well before the Brussels bombshell about meat on the bone. "We haven't taken any sheep to market for two weeks because we can't afford to," said the Cumbrian farmer. The Armstrongs run a 400-acre mixed farm in the Eden Valley, overlooked by the North Pennines. It provides a living for three families. Les and his brother, who farm with two of their sons, and a hired hand. But if the slump in the farm's income in beef, lamb and milk continues, the employees may have to go.

Farm economics make betting on the future market look simple. Normally the Armstrongs sell about 40 sheep at nearby Lazonby market every week. Last year at this time lambs made £58 a head but the brothers reckon they would be lucky to get £38 this week.

Why? The flat-capped protesters at ports complain about a strong pound but that is only one factor in the crash in lamb prices. Compared with last year there are at least 1m more lambs in the fields. With a good grazing season, farmers have not rushed to market. Many who bought stock in the summer for fattening actually paid more in August than it would fetch now. There is also plenty of other meat in the shops; pig production is up and at Christmas shoppers think poultry.

But Les Armstrong can't hold back from selling for

long. The age at which sheep can be sold as lamb - 12 months - is fast approaching. Last week's call from EU scientists for a ban on the sale of certain types of lamb on the bone only adds to the predicament.

In recent days there have been caustic reminders from experts, comfortably distant from the farm yard, of the fat years that followed the collapse of the pound. Total farm income in the United Kingdom soared to £5.2bn in 1995 but is expected to drop to £3.5bn for this year, close to the 1992 level. With 15.2 million lambs under 12 months old, Britain has the highest sheep flock in the EU and almost 50 per cent go for export. Mr Armstrong expects his income from sheep to be down by £15,000-£20,000 this year. He complains of a "double whammy" from the strength of the pound. Exports have been lost while the EU subsidy for his 850 ewes has dropped because it is fixed in ecus.

The NFU has appealed to the Government to get another £980m from Brussels under a scheme to compensate farmers hit by currency fluctuations. But in a blunt rejection, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Jack Cunningham, said nearly all the money - about £838m - would have to come from the British taxpayer. The only ray of hope is for hill farmers with Maff officials hinting at a £100m increase in subsidy.

Tim Bennett, who farms 160 acres in Carmarthen, Dyfed, said the rural economy was on the brink. He is losing money on the beef he takes to market and the milk he sells from 60 cows. A year ago he was getting 25p a litre, now the price is less than 20p. "We are facing a severe recession in rural Britain. Not just farmers but the jobs of thousands of people who work in abattoirs, shops and market towns are threatened," Mr Bennett said.



Battling to survive: Trevor Beavan on his farm in the hills above Abergavenny, where he keeps 1,000 head of sheep and 80 cattle

Photograph: Brian Harris

## Bleak outlook for hill farmer facing a crisis too far

"People say what a lovely view you've got". But farmers can't live off a view. Few would dispute the magnificent prospect from the slopes of Skirryd Mountain, overlooking the Usk Valley, where Trevor Beavan's hardy sheep graze and where legend has it, the Devil stamped in rage to give the mountain a peculiar indented edge.

As sheep farmers across the land tighten their belts, Mr Beavan's warning is prophetic. A year ago, his lambs sold for around £55 a head. In Abergavenny market this week, prices rarely reached £38.

More than 1,000 ewes and some 80 cattle share the 350 acres, a stone's throw from Offa's Dyke, the earthwork built in the 8th century by the King of Mercia to guard against the Welsh.

Not long ago, Mr Beavan, 62, ran 150 cattle but he sold nearly half to raise some cash. Sporting an Ernest Hemingway beard and possessed of a steely determination, he has been farming all his life. His sons, Huw, 33, and Jim, 30, work with him while his wife, Anoe, presides over Great Treherw farm, a solid stone

building dating from the 16th century.

The family typifies the cornerstones of Britain's rural life, struggling in what some fear may be a crisis too far.

Sides of bacon in muslin bags hang in the beamed kitchen. A Welsh dresser, a piano and arrays of shining brass stand sentinel near a table over which the arithmetic of a business hit by the BSE crisis and low livestock prices is discussed.

Co-operation is the order of the day. Earlier this week, Huw and Jim were out helping at a

turkey farm. "They do a bit of contract shearing, and they'll turn their hands to anything," Mrs Beavan says.

In uncertain times, income is derived from whatever source presents itself. Sweetheads from castrated cattle are sold to the famous Walnut Tree Inn five miles down the road.

Mr Beavan reckons that live lamb earns about 85p per kilo at market. At Abergavenny's Tesco supermarket, a short stroll from the pens, lamb chops were on sale this week at £10.29 per kilo. Add in cheap antelopean imports and it is not

hard to understand farmers' worries.

Mr Beavan uses 30 acres of good Monmouthshire soil to grow barley and oats to feed to his stock - a useful and ecologically friendly input at a time when costs had to be tightly controlled.

"You've got to remember that there's four legs to a sheep but on the butcher's slab there are really only two - the best cuts come from the hind quarters," Mr Beavan said as a tractor carrying fodder for the ewes ground up the mountain-side.

Looking east, it is possible to make out the line of Offa's Dyke. The Beavan land touches White Castle, an ancient Norman fortress employed for the defence against all comers. The summer tourists are long gone but on a misty December day its defensive position is clear to see.

Today, the defence of a way of life and an important industry resides in another "White" - Whitehall. A little help from Strasbourg wouldn't come amiss on the slopes of Skirryd, either.

— Tony Heath

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## Italy weeps as Agnelli dynasty's brave new hope dies at 33

He was the great hope for the future of the Agnelli dynasty; young, smart, good looking and, at 33, already well on his way to the top of the Fiat industrial empire. But this weekend Giovanni Alberto Agnelli died of a rare form of intestinal cancer, plunging Italy into the sort of mourning usually reserved for princes and film stars. Andrew Gumbel reports.

He was every Italian mama's dream child: industrious, discreet, well turned-out and always even tempered. Being an Agnelli, and thus a member of the closest thing Italy has to a royal family, Giovanni Alberto - Giovannino to his friends and the Italian media - was also an emblem for a whole generation of young people and their hopes for the next century.

Certainly he was born to unlimited privilege and owed much of his youthful prominence to his wealth and family connections. But in a country where power is jealously guarded by old men, Giovannino stood out as just about the only worthwhile public figure under the age of 40.

He had taken over his mother's company, the scooter manufacturer Piaggio, and steered it out of the doldrums to renewed prosperity. Two years ago his uncle, the outgoing Fiat chairman Gianni Agnelli, and his father, Umberto Agnelli, officially anointed him as the man who would lead Fiat into the third millennium.

Giovannino seemed to be a person who could do no wrong. Just about the most scandalous thing he ever did was pose for a press photographer with his feet on his desk. Although the media was forever sniffing around for romantic gossip, he gave them no satisfaction and ended up marrying an old flame from his college days in the United States, Avery Howe.

Giovannino began to feel ill on his return from a much postponed honeymoon to India in February this year. Two months later he gave an interview to the paper, owned by his family, the Turin daily *La Stampa*, and made two announcements. The first was that his wife was pregnant. The second was that a rare form of tumour had been found in his peritoneum, and he would be spending several months undergoing treatment in New York.

"It won't be a brief process, but I have every reason to believe I will overcome it," he said at the time.

True to his discreet nature, he never uttered another word about his illness, and once he returned to Italy in August one could have been forgiven for assuming he was cured. But Giovannino did not return to his office at Piaggio, staying instead within the family cocoon in Turin as he underwent further treatment.

His last public appearance was on Wednesday, to see his beloved football team Juventus overcome Manchester United 1-0 in the European Champions League. His condition worsened the next day, and



Golden boy: Giovanni Agnelli, astride a Vespa last year, was the emblem of a generation

Photograph AP

his body finally gave up at lunchtime on Saturday. He was buried in the Agnelli tomb at dawn yesterday in a ceremony attended only by his closest family, including his three-month-old daughter Virginia.

Giovannino's illness had been casting shadow over the succession at Fiat. The present chairman, Cesare Romiti, is due to retire next year although he may be asked to stay on until Fiat's centenary in 1999.

A few names for a successor have been bandied about, notably that of the former

General Electric manager Paolo Fresco.

The prospect of an Agnelli taking the helm again soon looks dim indeed. The only person approaching Giovannino's talents and promise is John Elkann. Gianni's grandson by his daughter Margherita. But Elkann is still at college, too young to be a safe bet. It could be that Giovannino's tragic death spells the end of the Agnellis as an industrial dynasty, and that Fiat is destined to become just another European car company. **Obituary, page 16**

## EU snub provokes Turkey to hit back

Turkey yesterday lashed out at the European Union, which snubbed it at the Luxembourg summit over the weekend. The Turkish Prime Minister, Mesut Yilmaz, dismissed an invitation to attend an EU conference on enlargement next year, which had been offered as a substitute for membership talks.

"Turkey's attendance at the EU conference has been made dependent on the fulfilment of conditions," Mr Yilmaz said yesterday. "This invitation does not have any importance for us."

"We will not accept any conditions," he told reporters after a two-hour emergency cabinet meeting to discuss the outcome of the Luxembourg meeting.

A state minister subsequently said that this meant Turkey would not attend the European Conference in Britain next March. The conference will launch the group towards its highest-ever expansion.

EU leaders proclaimed "the dawn of a new era" after a historic two-day summit ended on Saturday, taking the first step towards opening the bloc's doors to the countries of former Communist-ruled Eastern Europe. They invited Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Estonia as well as Cyprus into membership negotiations starting on 31 March and promised that negotiations with five others - Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania - could begin as soon as they were deemed ready. All 11 will be invited to a ceremonial launch of the enlargement process on 30 March.

Turkey, an applicant to join the EU since 1963, managed to secure recognition for the first time of its "eligibility for accession to the European Union". But an invitation to Ankara to take part in a standing European conference where joint approaches to such questions as drug trafficking could be agreed did little to allay Turkish suspicions of a firm snub.

Ankara's anger both at being left out of the enlargement process and at being accused of human rights abuses by the Luxembourg Prime Minister who hosted the summit has soured relations to the point where Turkey could now complicate the launch of negotiations with Cyprus.

In another sign of trouble on the horizon, squabbles over the cost of expanding the EU erupted just hours after the invitations were extended. Summit leaders tried to abandon draft conclusions on a sweeping package of reform to the bloc's hugely expensive regional and farm supports after a clash between Spain, representing the poorer regions, and Germany, leading the "paymasters".

Backing proposals to carry out enlargement without spending more money but with the help of radical farm policy reform, Tony Blair - who assumes the EU presidency in two weeks time - warned "we cannot seriously maintain the CAP [Common Agricultural Policy] in its present form and enlarge the European Union".

— Katherine Butler and Andrew Marshall, page 13

## France accused of being war criminals' friend

The French-controlled sector of Bosnia has become a haven for war criminals, says the chief prosecutor at the international tribunal at The Hague. Paris is also refusing to allow senior military officers to appear before the tribunal. John Lichfield asks: What is going on?

Even at its most petty and bloody-minded, French foreign policy is generally defended in the French press. Not on this occasion.

In a stinging editorial at the weekend, *Le Monde* accused the French government of obstructing the war crimes investigations in both Bosnia and Rwanda. France had become an international "nutcase", *Le Monde* said. It was "working against peace" by compounding the "impunity" of Bosnian war criminals.

Louise Arbour, the chief prosecutor for both the Bosnian and Rwandan tribunals, will meet the French foreign minister, Hubert Védrine, in Paris today. She will be asking two principal questions.

Why, of all the countries involved in Bosnian peace-keeping, is France alone refusing to allow its military officers to testify before the tribunal? And why is France refusing to take any action against the many indicted war criminals - including Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic - living in the part of Bosnia under French military control?

In an interview with *Le Monde*, Ms Arbour accused France of seeking to "limit access to the truth". She hinted that she might ask the UN to take action to nudge

France to send senior officers to testify. Meanwhile, she said, the many indicted war criminals living in the French sector of Bosnia "have, at the present moment, a feeling of complete security".

"The great majority of those indicted, including the most important, are in the French sector. There are enormous opportunities for action in the French sector. And yet we are faced with total inertia. The only conclusion one can draw is that it is deliberate policy."

The obstructive French attitude to the war crimes tribunals - which France voted in the UN to set up - has been apparent for months but never officially admitted until last week. The defence minister, Alain Richard, then made a swinging attack on the "theatrical justice" of the tribunals. He said he would never allow French officers to testify in The Hague. They would give evidence only in writing.

This policy is, by all accounts, being dictated by the officers themselves. They are said to be wary of the "Anglo-Saxon" form of adversarial litigation and cross-examination practised in The Hague. Whether or not they have something to hide - and French officers and others, were implicated in UN failings before the Srebrenica massacre in 1994 - they fear that they will become *de facto* defendants.

The French refusal to take action against war criminals in its sector of Bosnia is more puzzling, *Le Monde* pointed out that the French military had always been pro-Serb and that this might be a partial explanation. Beyond that, the newspaper said, no one - neither in the foreign ministry, nor in the President's or the Prime Minister's entourage - had been willing to defend or explain the policy.

## Neo-Gaullists change name

The neo-Gaullist party founded by Jacques Chirac in 1976, the *Rassemblement pour la République*, is to change its name. It will in future be known simply as *Le Rassemblement* (the rally or the bringing-together).

The decision is part of an effort by the new president of the party, Philippe Séguin, to re-invigorate the party and also to return it to its Gaullist roots. "Le Rassemblement" was always the popular title for the original Gaullist party, *Le Rassemblement du Peuple Français*, (RPF), which collapsed after the death

of General de Gaulle. The change of name is a further sign that President Chirac is losing control of the RPR, which was created as a vehicle for his presidential ambitions. His standing in the party, and the wider alliance of centre and right parties, was severely damaged by his decision to call an early general election last May which was, against expectations, won by the Left. Mr Séguin's selection as party president, soon afterwards, was seen as the first step towards a presidential challenge of his own.

— John Lichfield, Paris

THE INDEPENDENT

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## China forces British aid worker to quit Tibet

A British aid worker based in Tibet is being forced to leave because the Chinese authorities refuse to renew her work visa. Chinese officials give no reason for the *de facto* expulsion of one of the few foreign aid experts in this sensitive region. Teresa Poole says Peking's fear of Westerners on the roof of the world raises big questions over a highly controversial European Union aid project.

For five months, exasperated Save the Children Fund UK (SCF) officials have been trying to work out what has gone wrong. Their only expatriate on the ground in Tibet, a 30-year-old education advisor, has been working there for three years improving village education. In July she went on holiday, but when SCF tried to renew her permit to return to Lhasa, China said no.

Since then, she has spent most of the time waiting in Nepal hoping that China would relent. But to no avail. She was allowed in for a week last month to sort out her affairs in Lhasa, but all attempts by senior SCF officials to obtain the new work permit – or at least an explanation – have failed. The SCF's deadline to the Tibet authorities of the first week of December passed without any response.

The case has unnerved foreign-aid workers in Lhasa, because an individual rather than an organisation has been targeted. There is a feeling that China is wary of Westerners who work in Tibet for several years, building up local contacts and speaking Tibetan.

China has also been leaning on the biggest NGO operating long-term in Tibet, Médecins sans Frontières Belgium, which had visa hitches at the same time for two foreign workers. MSF's Big Bone Disease project ran into difficulties with the local partner, and the Chinese told the agency that its two foreign physiotherapists had been in China too long. The problems were only resolved when senior MSF Belgium officials flew to Lhasa.

SCF has been in Tibet for 6 years and

runs education and environmental programmes. An SCF spokeswoman in London would not comment on the permit refusal, and requested that the aid worker's name not be published. The village schools programme will continue, she said. "We are really sad that our education advisor will not be continuing to work with the programme, but she has worked with a team to set up a project which our Tibetan staff will be implementing," she added.

The big question is what this means for the European Union's much-delayed 7.6m (£6m) Panam aid project, which is supposed to involve foreign NGOs with Tibet experience. Should Sir Leon Brittan, a vice president of the European Commission, even contemplate signing the agreement with China if NGOs do not have the right

to keep the staff they need in Tibet? He is hoping to sign before Christmas.

The Panam Integrated Rural Development Project, which includes irrigation, agriculture, education and health schemes for an area 200km south-west of Lhasa, has a turbulent history. It was suspended in January 1995, amid accusations in the European Parliament that it would encourage Han Chinese migration into Tibet and damage the environment.

A reappraisal was made by the EU. The final version of the project agreement is understood to specify that NGOs with local experience will be "favourably considered" to implement the education and health components of Panam. Confirmation that NGOs familiar with Tibet would be centrally involved was crucial in persuading sceptical

MEPs to endorse Panam. But Commission officials have yet to come clean about the non-involvement of the prime NGO candidates, even though SCF informed Brussels of the permit problem last month. The SCF spokeswoman said: "Panam was something ... that we were looking at ... [But] without this education advisor in post, we would not have the capacity to go ahead."

MSF Belgium made it clear to the EU a year ago that it would not be involved in Panam, preferring to concentrate its resources on poorer areas. The Swiss Red Cross is the only other long-term NGO in Tibet. Sadly, the EU official in Peking with responsibility for Panam was "too busy" to discuss the project, and written questions put to the EU's Peking mission on Friday received no response.

## Mandela goes into last lap as president

President Nelson Mandela reassured South Africans yesterday that there would be a peaceful transfer of power as he winds down his presidency, saying he could support a rival party member as deputy president.

Mr Mandela, 79, is stepping down as head of the ruling African National Congress at a convention starting tomorrow in the northern town of Mafikeng. His successor will be Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, who is expected to follow him as president in the 1999 elections.

In a live television interview, Mr Mandela said he would be "happy" to see Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the minister of home affairs, as Mr Mbeki's deputy president. He said a merger between Inkatha and ANC would help national unity and would be "a very progressive development."

Cheryl Carolus, acting ANC secretary-general, yesterday confirmed a newspaper report that Inkatha would send its first-ever delegation to an ANC conference.

Mr Mandela repeated past statements that he has begun the process of transferring power to Mr Mbeki. "He is the man who is already running the country," he said. "I am a *de jure* president and Thabo Mbeki is already the *de facto* president."

— AP, Johannesburg



Aiming high: A member of the Iranian shooting team practising in Tehran for the Islamic Countries Women's Sports Games which started at the weekend. The sticker on her rifle butt shows Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, founder of the Iranian Revolution, and Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, current spiritual leader. Photograph: Eric Martin/AP

## Iran leader moves to befriend US

The Iranian President, Mohammad Khatami, went further than any other leader of revolutionary Iran in opening the way to dialogue with the United States. After a week in which he made his international debut as leader of the Muslim world's largest body, Mr Khatami said he hoped for a thoughtful dialogue with the American people "in the close future".

The 55-year-old Shiite cleric hatched the taboo topic of talks with the Americans, Iran's adversary for two decades, by telling reporters at a news conference in Tehran: "I declare my respects to the great people of the United States and I hope that in the close future I would have a dialogue and talk with the people of America and I hope this will not take long."

Mr Khatami, who defeated conservative rivals for power in a landslide election in May, reiterated his desire for dialogue between civilisations. But he deflected the question when he was asked how he expected dialogue with the US to come about. And he did not go so far as to say there would be contacts any time soon between the two governments.

"The government of the United States is the government of the United States elected by the people. We respect the choice of the people," he said.

— Reuters, Tehran

## Portugal goes to the polls

Portuguese voters went to the polls in local elections which are widely seen as a popularity test for the minority Socialist government. Portugal's government looks set to emerge unscathed from the local authority elections and likely to maintain the momentum to serve its full four-year term. Despite the recent resignation of a leading minister in a tax scandal, opinion polls point to the Socialists retaining the leading cities of Lisbon and Oporto and taking more votes across the country than their main Social Democrat opponents.

— Reuters, Lisbon

## Power play in Guyana

Guyana, the only English-speaking country in South America, goes to the polls to elect a new president today. The polls favour Janet Jagan, the 77-year-old widow of former president Cheddi Jagan, a one-time Marxist who helped liberate Guyana from Britain in 1966. Mrs Jagan's main opponent is former president Desmond Hoyte of the PNC, who lost the 1992 election.

## Mauritania president stays on

Mauritania's incumbent president, Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya, was declared the overwhelming victor after elections that were boycotted by opposition groups. Mr Taya, who took power in a 1984 military coup and legalised political opposition parties in 1991, captured 90 per cent of the vote on Friday, figures released by the Interior Ministry said. The government claimed a turnout of about 74 per cent of the 1.2 million eligible voters, despite opposition claims that the boycott was widely observed.

## Wolves settle into new home too well for their own good

A programme to reintroduce grey wolves into two areas of the northern Rocky Mountains, including Yellowstone National Park, could be reversed – because it has been too successful. A United States federal court judge ruled that the three-year old programme was unlawful and ordered that the wolves – now estimated to number more than 150 – should be removed.

The decision was welcomed by ranchers in the states of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, who had strongly objected to the reintroduction of the wolves; the case had been brought on their behalf by the American Farm Bureau Federation. It was condemned, however, by government biologists and environmentalists who had campaigned to re-establish all the mammals that had lived in Yellowstone when it was declared the first US national park in 1872.

The judge's ruling, which is

subject to appeal, is the latest round in a continuing trial of strength between ranchers and conservationists in the northern Rockies. Half a century ago, the US government sided with the ranchers and ordered the extermination of the wolves, which were accused of attacking the ranchers' livestock. Three years ago, the Clinton administration heeded conservationists and the wolves were reintroduced from Canada. They have thrived and become a tourist attraction.

Environmental groups were divided on the merits of the programme, however. The majority supported the wolves' return, but some, including the Audubon Society, objected that – in a compromise offered to the ranchers – they were not granted the special protection accorded to endangered species.

The judge based his decision on a technicality deriving from the fact

that there were already some wolves in the region, recent migrants from Canada, when the reintroduction programme began. The programme provided for the new group's status as an experimental population to be extended to the other group, which had formerly been considered an endangered species. It was this reduction of their protection that, in the judge's view, invalidated the programme.

The ruling is subject to appeal, and until then the wolves remain. But one solution – that the government tries to extend endangered species protection to the new wolves – would be as keenly contested as the reintroduction programme itself. At present, ranchers may shoot wolves that worry their livestock outside the park. If the wolves were designated an endangered species, that would be illegal.

— Mary Dejevsky  
Washington

## Weak Yeltsin casts his vote

A pale President Boris Yeltsin complained yesterday of having a sore throat and feeling weak, but said his doctors had assured him he would be better in about 10 days. "In general I'm not feeling well," said Mr Yeltsin at the government sanatorium where he was hospitalised last week with a respiratory viral infection. But despite feeling under the weather, the 66-year-old Russian leader smiled and joked as he cast his ballot in Moscow city council elections at a polling station set up in the sanatorium.

— AP, Moscow

## Suharto rebuts health rumours

President Suharto of Indonesia made a televised address to assure the country about his health after a week of rumours sent financial markets tumbling. "I had been advised by doctors to rest. But now I am healthy and in good condition," the 76-year-old said in a broadcast from his home in Jakarta on Saturday night. It was his first public statement in 10 days.

Suharto has governed Indonesia for more than three decades. He is expected to be re-elected to a seventh consecutive five-year term by a 1,000-member assembly in March. Despite his age, he has not nominated a successor.

Last week the rupiah, already battered by Asia's financial crisis, dropped 22 per cent to a record low, and the stock market plunged as nervous dealers and brokers swapped rumours that Suharto was seriously ill, that he had suffered a mild stroke or even that he had died. Repeated denials by government ministers did little to quell the speculation. On Friday, he cancelled a trip to Malaysia for a meeting of leaders from the nine-member Association of South-East Asian Nations, further fuelling the rumours. Earlier, the government had said he would attend.

— AP, Jakarta

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Zimbabwe's rich white farmers are being threatened with land seizure and eviction. They also face the prospect of a tobacco belt now drowning in despair.



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## Mugabe offers up farms to pay off his political debts

**Zimbabwe's rich white farmers are being threatened with land seizure and eviction. Mory Braid visits the prosperous tobacco belt, now drowning in despair.**

Ahead, the dense bush shimmers in the fierce heat of the Zimbabwean midday sun. "Oh man, just look at that," says Warwick Evans, 37, brimming with pride.

It is 10 years since Mr Evans bought his farm in Trelawney, the prosperous tobacco belt, an hour's drive west of Harare. It was whispered then that the lucky newcomer had paid too much. But Mr Evans, full of energy and vision, has quadrupled the farm's output and become one of Zimbabwe's farming high fliers.

Soon all he has worked for could disappear. For Mr Evans is one of 1,500 commercial farmers - mostly white - whose land has been listed for compulsory seizure by the Zimbabwean president, Robert Mugabe.

After almost two decades of black majority rule, President Mugabe says land stolen by white colonials must now be handed over to poor blacks.

President Mugabe's rhetoric is crude, ignoring for instance, that many "listed" farms are not

ers. The government is trying to create a smokescreen for political failure and hopes veterans can be bought off with land.

Farmers are now scapegoats in a political gamble which threatens the entire economy. They are Zimbabwe's highest earners of foreign currency and employ hundreds of thousands of people. The majority of Zimbabwean businesses depend on the agricultural sector. Months of uncertainty have already halted farm investment; the whole economy is suffering.

At Trelawney's farm machinery workshop, Felicity Pentland-Smith, farmer's wife and grand-daughter of Winston Field, a former Rhodesian prime minister, accuses the government of inciting racial hatred.

Thousands of workers recently stoned farmhouses and beat up farmers during their first strike over wages. Mrs Pentland-Smith was trapped in the shop by a mob of 200.

"Mugabe constantly talks about indigenous people," she says. "I am a Zimbabwean. We have invested everything we have in this country. If we leave we leave with nothing."

Her neighbours are also bitter at being targeted after years of "reconciliation" rhetoric. At another farm, the owner of inherited land, also listed, cannot sleep for worry. "We will trash this place before we leave," says his wife.

But while the farmers are undoubtedly whipping boys, ingrained white racism - particularly among the older generation - only strengthens the president's hand.

In Trelawney the old colonial ways are preserved. In magnificent farm houses, with manicured lawns, tennis courts and swimming pools, whites still live like kings served by silent armies of deferential blacks. The racial divide is strictly observed. White conversation is casually and intensely racist; and there is no shame.

Mr Evans, the local farm union representative, is part of a younger, more enlightened generation. He has built a school, a clinic and three-bedroom pre-fab houses for 150 workers and their families.

He lives in considerable style and makes no apologies but says his workers must share in the prosperity. Not everyone in Trelawney appreciates his attitude, arguing he is forcing them to improve working conditions.

Dinosaur racism lives on. But the farmers can justifiably point to farms previously acquired by government which now lie derelict or have become holiday homes for ministers.

One of the few black commercial farmers to have broken into Trelawney's once all-white club agrees land redistribution, as proposed, will be a disaster.

The farmer, who prefers to remain anonymous, was involved in previous programmes to resettle peasants on commercial land. He says lack of money for training and investment guaranteed the peasants remained subsistence farmers.

Dismayed to find himself on the land grab list, he says that even if his colour wins him a reprieve the purchase of surrounding farms will have a disastrous effect on business.

Mr Evans still hopes that reason will prevail. He believes in Zimbabwe. "We can be an African tiger," he says. "But Mickey Mouse money [the falling Zimbabwe dollar] means Mickey Mouse government."

It will be nothing short of criminal if a Mugabe cronie is soon taking in the view from Mr Evans' front porch.



Police surround the Catholic Commissioner for Justice and Peace (centre left) in Harare during last week's general strike. Photograph: Reuters

## HUMAN RIGHTS COURT FOR AFRICA

African ministers of justice and attorneys-general agreed to establish a permanent African court on human rights, in hopes of improving individual rights and freedoms on the continent.

Under the proposal, Organisation of African Unity member-states and individual citizens who are victims of human rights abuses will be able to lodge complaints to the court against their own or other governments alleged to have violated the rights.

However, it wasn't clear from the document what decisions or judgments the court can pronounce upon those found to be violating human rights. The court will be based on the Charter of the African Human and Peoples' Rights, which is ratified by every member-state.

The proposal will be submitted to the next conference of OAU ministers, who will in turn submit nominations for the court's eight judges. Legal experts from the 53 OAU countries have met three times since 1995 to work out the recommendations and legal framework for the establishment of the court.

— AP, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



Robert Mugabe: Fighting for political survival

colonial inheritances but were bought on the open market in the last 25 years.

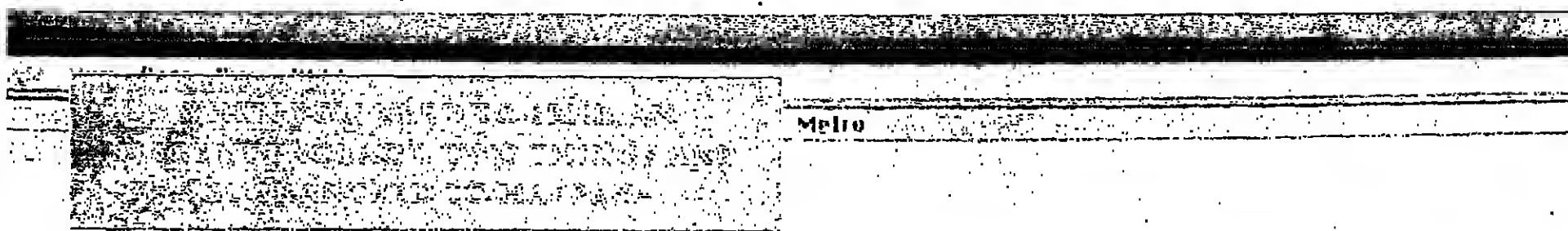
But a man fighting for political survival has no use for detail. This week, 50,000 war veterans, who brought President Mugabe to power, are expecting the fulfilment of a long-overdue presidential promise: a one-off combat reward payment of 50,000 Zimbabwe dollars (£1,635) and a £22,000 (£64) monthly pension.

The veterans have already rioted and President Mugabe is terrified of a coup. Just where he will find the cash is hard to say. In a country riddled with corruption, the veteran pension fund has already been looted and years of economic mismanagement have sent the currency into freefall.

Last week millions staged the country's first national strike to oppose new taxes to fund the veterans' payout. The strike, a week after 50 ministers were each issued with a Mercedes Benz and a Jeep, unleashed an outpouring of anti-government sentiment.

The state's response was brutal. In Harare the police attacked demonstrators with tear gas and sjamboks. The following day, trade union leader Morgan Tsvangirai was found unconscious and savagely beaten on the floor of his blood-splattered office.

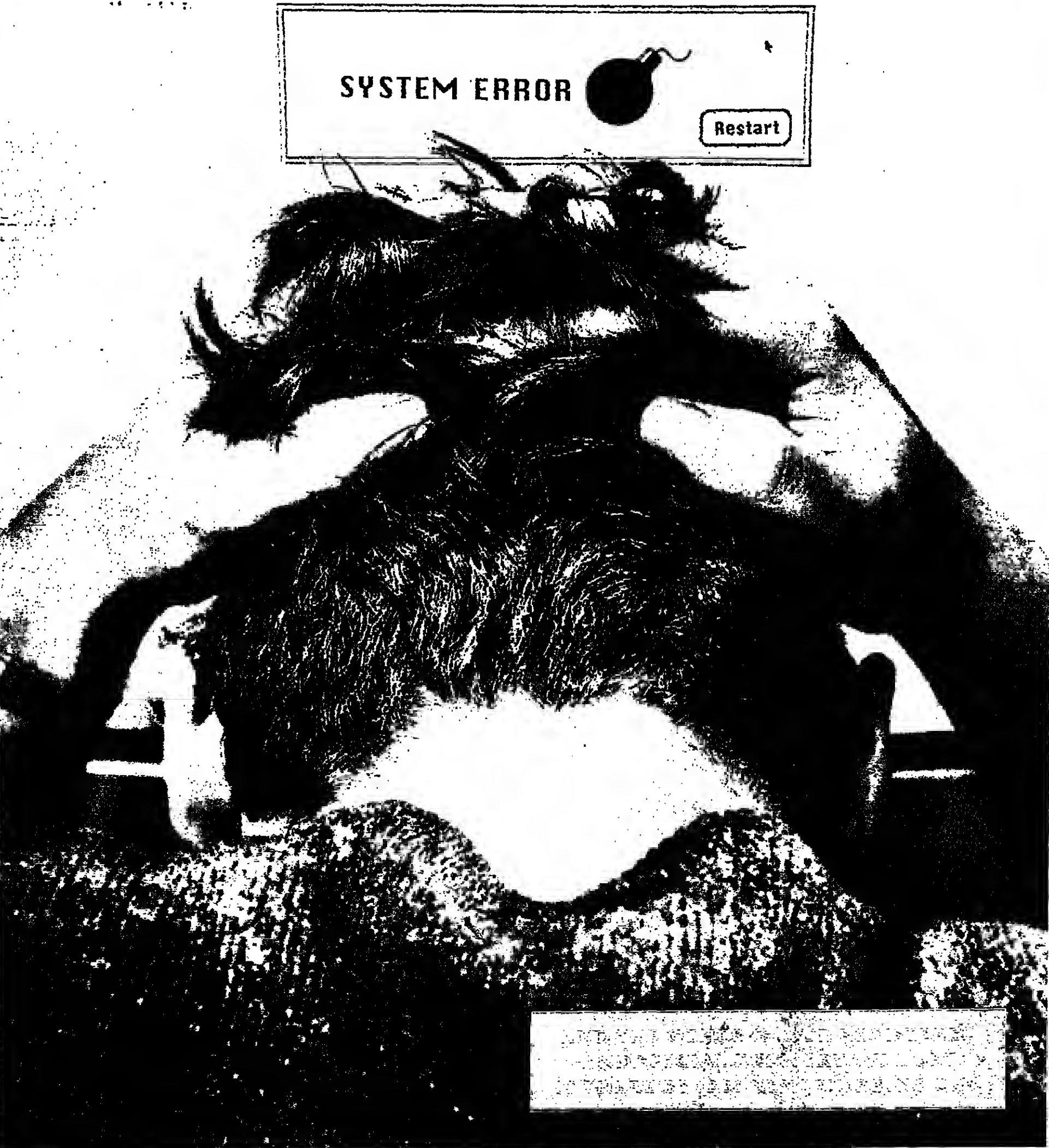
With few cards left to play, President Mugabe has returned to two old favourites: racial division and the land issue - most of Zimbabwe's commercial farmland is still owned by white farm-



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# 12/LEADER & LETTERS

## Hold still while we pin a class label on you



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Class is dead, long live the classless society. Or so the late and very little lamented Tories wanted us to believe. But class, it seems, is not only firmly with us, it is becoming ever more complex. Young people certainly believe that class determines their prospects (see our front-page story today). And the Government, which needs to classify people for all kinds of reasons, still thinks we are differentiated by work, but thinks class distinctions are more finely shaded than they were (see page three).

Telling who belongs where in the social order in the queue at Sainsbury's has become far from easy. We may all seem equal as consumers, but in the world of production, hierarchy still rules. That jocular phrase "the boss class" says it all. Or does it? Take, for example, Howard Davies, the City bigwig. He carries a torch for Manchester City. Nowadays it is common for rich and powerful men to identify with soccer clubs. They might sincerely

answer the question - "Who are you?" - by referring to their Saturday afternoon vocation. An affection, surely? It is something completely outside the sphere that matters - employment - where their identities are secure. Thanks to their money, they can afford a class-free hit on the side.

But put it that way and it sounds patronising towards the hundreds of thousands of non-rich people whose being is bound up with the fortunes of a club. And not just a soccer club, either. The Ministry of Sound, the Frigate or Subterania are no less defining. The leisure scene is a maze of taxonomies, based on clothes, drugs, DJs, musical style. And all of it matters, deeply, in defining who people are. According to a study of young people in Newcastle upon Tyne, identity derives not from a job, or lack of one, but from their sense of themselves: where they meet their mates, what and how much they drink, who their friends are.

Social classification remains as relevant

as ever, yet conventional labels no longer seem to provide much information. In a recent book, David Marquand argued that left-right should give way to a distinction between what he called hedonists and moralists. Earlier this week, a study based on MORI data suggested that the terrain of politics needs a new set of fences. People are libertarian, authoritarian and a lot in between, but they do not fit easily into partisan templates of formal politics.

That is, presumably, the reason why Tony Blair strove before the election to spring his party from its historic identifiers. It is why some of us want proportional representation - to allow pluralism of values a clearer expression in the political field.

So against such a background, it comes as a shock to be told not just that class is still with us, but that social classes are shaped in no radically different way from what they were when, 150 years ago, two German immigrants wrote the *Communist Manifesto*. The Office for National

Statistics and the Economic and Social Research Council have published their revision of the old division of the social classes (class one, "professional", class five, "unskilled occupations" and so on). Instead, they propose eight classes, from professionals, employers and managers in bigger organisations (class one) down to never-worked and long-term unemployed (class eight).

The sociologists are saying that there is still one way of distinguishing people, at least for official purposes, and that is by looking at where we work and how much power we have when we get there.

On one obvious level, the sociologists are right: behind the clubs and the pubs and the leisure identities lies money. No money, no work, no lager, ecstasy tabs or flash clothes. Howard Davies belongs to a different universe, in terms of his and his children's life chances, from most of the rest of Manchester City's supporters. Health and the likelihood of falling prey

to a long-term illness are closely related to occupation. A child's educational attainment links with dad's job.

But there is another view. Old-fashioned class just does not capture the way we live our lives as free-to-choose individuals. People are not to be cribbed and confined by the positions they occupy in the labour market. They can break out.

The materialist theory of history got going a long time before Karl Marx. One of its devotees once said man is what he eats. This week we had the Consumers' Association having a go at the Two Fat Ladies and fellow celebrity cooks for encouraging us to eat unhealthily. The response was swift: one of the great divides in the modern world is between those who enjoy their food and those for whom eating is a guilt trip. Are jobs and income really the way to understand how people struggle to assert a personal identity in a bureaucratic world? No, the world, and the people in it, are more interesting than that by far.

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Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk  
E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address.  
Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

## LETTERS

### Asylum seekers

Sir: As lawyers defending the rights of immigrants and asylum seekers, we write to express our increasing concern at the lack of substantial change in the treatment of these groups by the Government. On the whole, the imperatives of exclusion still dominate policy.

When, in the summer, Somali asylum seekers arrived from France on Eurostar, Mike O'Brien MP was at the Gare du Nord in a flash, threatening an extension of carriers' liability if the company continued to allow the asylum seekers to board. There has been no similar sense of urgency over the restoration of basic subsistence benefits to asylum seekers (the withdrawal of which last year was held by the Court of Appeal to create for some "a life so destitute that... no civilised national can tolerate it"); no attempt has been made to resume the responsibility shouldered since then by local authorities. Then came the arrival of the Czech gypsies, and the use by the Government of the same intemperate language of "abuse" and "bogus asylum seekers" rightly condemned by Labour in the past as likely to inflame racism.

We note also the extremely tough line on detention of asylum seekers (witnessed by an increase in the numbers detained by up to a hundred a day, and by the use, for the first time ever, of riot charges against asylum seekers protesting their detention); and the bureaucracy which invalidates applications for renewal of leave and renders applicants liable to deportation, for failure to tick the right box. All these are further indications that, while ministers may find Tory policies abhorrent in principle, they find them expedient in practice.

Reviews are currently being undertaken on many aspects of immigration and asylum law. We urge ministers to be guided in their imminent policy decisions by principle rather than expediency, and by respect for the universality of human rights.

IAN MACDONALD QC; NICK BLAKE QC; OWEN DAVIES; LAURIE FRANKMAN; STEPHANIE HARRISON; RAZA HUSAIN; RICK SCANNELL; DURAN SEDDON; FRANCES WEBBER; TIM TREUHERTZ  
The Immigration group  
London EC1



### BSE research

Sir: Last Thursday's *Dispatches* report on Channel 4 showed how scientists dealing with BSE tried to publish the data that they found but it was kept hidden by higher decisions.

At the time I was one of the few "outside" people who knew enough of the subject to enable them to tell me in private what was happening, and I am now worried that they will be used as the scapegoats.

I knew that Ministry of Agriculture announcements to the public were misleading, and that the truth was much more severe than what seemed to be getting through to the House of Commons. I cannot see how the civil servants involved would admit those decisions to any inquiry without subpoenas, and without that, it would seem that it was the scientists who did not carry out the necessary research.

Of course they knew in 1989 that BSE was not the same as scrapie, that it would infect dif-

ferent animals, that we ate large amounts of bovine brain, that a major risk had been taken, and we were doing no research into methods of treatment or diagnosis.

This must not happen again and we must find out how it came about.

Dr STEPHEN DEALLER  
Consultant Microbiologist  
Burnley General Hospital  
Burnley, Lancashire  
The writer is secretary of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Research Campaign

### Theatrical heritage

Sir: The select committee report on the Royal Opera House was a journalistic exercise based on public interviews with the main players. Professor John Steer (letter, 10 December) was the first to recommend pinches of salt. However, the Tower Bridge option ceased to be realistic when the proposal was called in for planning. What was really needed was positive gov-

ernment assistance in finding an alternative home.

In any other country, the Theatre Royal Drury Lane would long ago have become a publicly owned building. There have been various opportunities for it to be bought for the nation in recent decades, once for as little as £4m.

Is it really in the interests of a healthy theatrical culture, for example, that shows like *Miss Saigon* can be "parked" in the West End for decades at a time? The industry of "cloned" live musical shows would be better provided on convenient near-outdoor London sites near motorways. Our marvellous heritage of London theatres ought to be serving a public for live spoken theatre that has largely been allowed to disappear.

Governments must set the framework for a healthy theatrical market, but ours never have. Abroad, Drury Lane would have faced a Compulsory Purchase Order to enable the reconstruction of the nation's

premier operatic and ballet showcase to proceed without farcical disruption.  
TOM SUTCLIFFE  
London SW16

Sir: Public money for the arts should go only to things where admission is free. Otherwise arts subsidy is a redistribution of wealth - upwards. Why should people who cannot afford to go to the opera or theatre have to pay for them?  
ANTHEA MANDER LAHR  
London W11

### First in the pulpit

Sir: Our father, the Rev D R Davies, who had an international reputation as a theologian in the Forties and Fifties, is no longer alive to challenge the Gunner brothers' family myth about the starting of *Pulpit Monthly*, described by Deborah Ross in her article on Peter Gunner. Lord Chadlington (8 December).

So we offer the following quotation from our father's

autobiography, *In Search of Myself*, published by Bles in 1961, to set the record straight.

While at Brighton... I published a monthly magazine called *Christian Renewal*. This was an immediate success and I continued it until another idea more in harmony with my particular outlook and love for preaching came to me and in co-operation with my very good friend Selwyn Gunner, as co-editor, I started *Pulpit Monthly*.

It was our father who had the idea and was the energy behind the setting up of the magazine. We do not think that the Rev Selwyn Gunner would disagree.

DIANA LEAP  
RACHEL BOULTON  
RICHARD DAVIES  
London N10

### Treating TB

Sir: The way Giles O'Brien caught TB ("I still have no idea how I caught TB", 9 December) probably has something to do with the ease and frequency of

international travel these days, breaking down the boundaries between Europe and those Third World countries where TB is endemic.

Mr O'Brien was lucky that he caught a treatable form of the disease. Increasingly, on account of the failure of patients to complete their courses of treatment, multidrug-resistant strains are appearing, requiring much longer and more expensive treatment. As 95 per cent of patients are in developing countries which cannot afford such courses, TB is well on the way to becoming virtually untreatable, and it isn't going to stay "over there". In a few years' time, Mr O'Brien's case may not be a one-off curiosity.

The World Health Organisation's new DOTS strategy (Directly Observed Treatment Short-course) has been achieving success rates of up to 93 per cent. The world needs to get behind this, quickly.

BILL LINTON  
London N13

### Labour and 'Today'

Sir: I read with interest your article (13 December) about the Labour Party threatening to suspend its co-operation with the *Today* programme. I was disgusted by the Tory attitude to the BBC and now it seems that Labour is following suit.

Politicians of every persuasion must realise that the BBC has every right to ask them, repeatedly if necessary, to tell the truth and the right to interrupt them if they are spouting the party line rather than replying to the question asked.

Any party in government should be open to, and able to answer, any question regarding their policies. The main thrust of the interview with Harriet Harman was the question of whether single mothers who did not wish to work would be worse off following the implementation of reduced benefits. The answer to that question is that they would be. If this reply had been made, interruptions would not have been necessary.

SAM YOUNG  
Tonbridge, Kent

### Lone parent policy

Sir: In the Labour Party document *Parenting* written by Jack Straw MP as shadow Home Secretary, and Janet Anderson MP as shadow Minister for Women, and published last year, it is stated (p.26) that: "Lone parents should be seen as a group on whom more support should be targeted in the interests of their children, rather than scapegoated as the current government has done."

Is the current Labour policy attributable to collective Cabinet amnesia? Dr GARY SLAPPER  
The Open University  
Milton Keynes

Sir: I am concerned that my wife's mother, who lives with us, stays at home all day and yet receives state support - her old-age pension. Despite her age, 87, she makes herself useful about the house - she does almost all the laundry and much of the cleaning - but I wonder whether we shouldn't send her out to work.

I suppose the domestic economy might then even be able to afford to get someone in once or twice a week to do some of the things she would have to leave undone.

JON GRAY  
Bath

## Three wise men and a baby, plus John the Baptist, Pontius Pilate and Mary: what a lineup!



MILES KINGDON

In the Christmas rush you probably don't get the time to catch all your regular TV and radio programmes, so here is a transcript of the special Christmas edition of *Melvin Bragg's 'Start the Week'* which is going out on Radio 4 this very Monday!

Bragg: Good morning. Today, as Christmas approaches, we have with us in the studio Three Wise Men from the East who have made a special study of what the stars can tell us. We also have Pontius Pilate, a Roman judge who is due to give a lecture at the Royal Hebrew Institute on Wednesday on the subject "What is Truth?". We have John the Baptist, who thinks that the human brain can look into the future and we have our token woman, Mary Magdalene, who works for the *Bethlehem Post*.

First, the Three Wise Men. Could you briefly sum up your message for those who haven't read your book?

1st Wise Man: We haven't written a book.

2nd Wise Man: We are too wise to write a book.

3rd Wise Man: If we wrote a book, people would steal our ideas.

Bragg: Right. So, if you had written a book, what idea would you be trying to get across?

1st Wise Man: Our idea is that if we follow the star...

2nd Wise Man: The star which has been pointed out to us...

3rd Wise Man: By a divine finger...

1st Wise Man: We will have discovered the son of God.

Bragg: This, frankly, strikes me as a load of tosh. You're asking us to believe that God told you to follow

a star and find his son at the end of the journey? Why didn't he just tell you where his son was?

1st Wise Man: Maybe he didn't know.

2nd Wise Man: Maybe only the star knew.

3rd Wise Man: Maybe he wanted us to find out from the star where his son was and report back.

Bragg: But hold on a moment! You're meant to be wise men! When you find the son of God, what will you learn from a baby? It doesn't make sense to me.

John the Baptist: I could have told them where he was but nobody ever believes me.

Bragg: Perhaps we could come to you in just a moment. Baptist, Pilate, do you want to come in here?

Pontius Pilate: Well, you say that we can learn nothing from a baby,

Melvin, and this is certainly true in the intellectual sense in that a baby can tell us nothing about astronomy or geography. That is because astronomy and geography mean nothing to a baby. But perhaps the baby is right! Perhaps astronomy and geography are, in the long run, meaningless and valueless.

Bragg: That's rubbish. I sometimes think that science is the only thing we have to cling on to. We arts people have ignored science for far too long.

1st Wise Man: Hold on a moment. What's this with the "we arts people" bit, Melvin?

2nd Wise Man: We're not "arts people". We're "wise" people.

3rd Wise Man: That means we see truth from all angles.

Pilate: Yes, but what is truth? Does it encompass following a star across

the Middle East looking for a baby? I think not. Does it encompass looking into the future, as John the Baptist thinks, and proclaiming the coming kingdom of God? I think not.

ENTER JONATHAN MILLER.

Miller: Sorry I'm late. My camel broke down. Did I hear someone use the word "cognitive" as I came in?

Bragg: No, Jonathan.

Miller: Oh, sorry.

EXIT JONATHAN MILLER

Bragg: Baptist, you believe you can see the future. Do you actually think the human brain will genetically evolve to acquire the ability to predict things?

Baptist: No. I can only tell the future because God wants me to.

Mary Magdalene: Gosh! That must

be wonderful! Baptist: Not really. I can foresee, for instance, that Salome, King Herod's daughter, will have my head cut off.

Mary Magdalene: Gosh! That's awful!

Baptist: Not really. At least it means I go straight to heaven.

Bragg: Hold on, hold on a moment. Let's define a few terms here. God, for a start. And heaven.

Mary Magdalene: Couldn't we talk about Salome and the dreadful Royal Family instead?

Baptist: What say you, Royal Family? There is a family greater than that of Herod's come among us!

There is a baby born to be King over us! Repent while there is time! Lo, I say unto you...

Bragg: That's all we have time for. See you next week.



## Why Europe needs the British awkward squad



ANDREW MARSHALL  
TABLE-THUMPERS  
AND DEAL-MAKERS

There are only three things which a British Prime Minister really needs to know when trying to get his or her way in Europe. The first is that the European Union is, in the last instance, run by France and Germany. The second is that everything will always end in a deal, which will be more or less satisfactory to everyone involved (but remember rule one). We'll come back to the third rule later.

Tony Blair got a lesson in these (somewhat unpalatable) European realities in Luxembourg this weekend. He wanted to strongarm his way into the club of countries running the single currency, even though he doesn't (for the moment) want to join monetary union itself. No dice, responded the French; the Germans shook their heads; and Mr Blair was forced to back away from some of his more extreme demands, though he has maintained some access to the mysteriously-titled Euro-X committee.

In the process, he irritated a lot of people, though that is frankly by the by. Nobody goes to these summits to make friends. Each of the leaders around the table has had his tantrums over the years.

But Mr Blair, of course, is inescapably British, and the British have a bit of a history at these events. We are only too often on our own, or in a minority, and consequently we are accustomed to being on the sharp end of the deal that inevitably ends every summit. More to the point – as far as our partners are concerned – we have a record of table-thumping, bickering, holding out and so on. We are the awkward squad, not just because we frequently hold a minority view, but also because we don't do our deals gracefully.

To some extent this is all very admirable: we go down, but we go down guns blazing. *C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre.* It's not very productive and it's not that useful in the longer term to the pursuit of British interests.

Mr Blair, of course, has said he wants to transcend this unhappy pattern of events. He has claimed a place for Britain at the head of the table, as the leader in Europe. That has irritated people in a more important way, and the antics in Luxembourg will have made it a bit worse. Who the hell does this Mr Blair think he is?

There are reasons why British ministers act like this. Europe is very different from

Westminster. We lack a domestic political tradition of compromise. In British politics, once you are elected, you get to run the country, and precious few people can get in your way, as Mr Blair demonstrated last week. British politics is adversarial. The rest of Europe is more used to compromise, consensus, coalition and deal-making.

Because of our historical experience, we lack insight into the European process; we started late and we still don't quite get the whole thing. The British political classes vacillate between regarding the EU as a fatuous irrelevance, or a deadly threat to their survival. And we find the Franco-German dominance of the EU hard to stomach, since it sits ill with our own rather solipsistic view of the world.

All very well, then, for Mr Blair to trumpet British leadership of the European Union, but the leaders of the other 14 nations have quite a lot of experience of London's delusions of grandeur. Perhaps that is why Chancellor Helmut Kohl reminded the Prime Minister of some basic realities in Luxembourg, encouraging him to salute the French tricolour thrice, and the German flag once.

None of this means we should shut up and do what we're told: Mr Blair was quite right to argue his case. And that brings us to the third rule that British Prime Ministers need to remember in Europe: Britain does have a crucial role to play, and without it, the Union won't, can't work.

Over the past decade the British critique of the EU has increasingly gained force, and indeed been taken on board. We do have influence, and France and Germany, as well as other nations which share our ideological perspective (especially the Scandinavians) rely on a British counterweight. But the British style of assertion – which is often unilateral, boastful and unrealistic – does not go down well.

Mr Blair has, in truth, the best opportunity of any leader since Edward Heath of playing a leadership role in Europe. He has a hefty majority, he has a whole five-year term stretching out ahead of him, and he has the British presidency of the EU, starting in January. There are plenty of problems on the agenda – enlargement, reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the budget – where a British perspective will be crucial.

There are already some indications that things will be different in Europe under Labour. The Luxembourg row was, after all, about Britain wanting to opt in to something, rather than out. But that is a legacy of the last government; we are lagging behind, and we have to fight to keep up with the big players.

A degree of British leadership – or at least, British assertion – will be welcomed, necessary even for the next year. But it's as well not to shove that down the throats of the other EU leaders. What they really want to see, for the moment, is a renewed British desire to participate, and to do so on the same terms as everyone else, neither seeking special treatment nor wanting to opt out.

But above all, remember rules one and two. Both of the last two Prime Ministers believed that Britain had a mission in Europe; neither understood the realities of power well enough to carry it out.

## You've squeezed single mothers; when is it the fat cats' turn?



POLLY TOYNBEE  
ON TAX AND  
WELFARE

The state of shock persists. What words describe how Labour feels now? Lost virginity, said one commentator, but that's not quite it. Blood on their hands like Lady Macbeth, said another, but that's not it either. It feels like a bereavement, said one MP. Old cynics looked on last week with the relish of seasoned squaddies inflicting initiation rites on raw recruits. But it's not just the new MPs, or just the Old Labour ones, but wise and foolish alike have a bruised, abused look, still in emotional shock.

But MPs have to take their share of the blame for failing to take issue with the lone-parent cuts early on when something could have been done to make sense of this policy. It was there for all to see long before the Budget – and even after the Budget they said nothing.

It was a mangled policy because internal conflict prevented the Government turning it into something that at least made sense. Was it a family-values strike against single motherhood? Not really, because they all knew it struck at abandoned wives who haven't a hope of getting a job, alongside women with older children in places where they might find work. Harriet Harman couldn't and wouldn't say it had any ideological significance, presumably because she doesn't believe in that at all. Yet others in government didn't mind hinting, with a wink and a nod, that perhaps it was a gesture to please the *Daily Mail*.

They could have turned it into a carrot and stick, rewarding those willing to seek work, punishing those with older children who chose not to, *Wisconsin-style*. At least that would have been coherent. Instead they tried to present it as a purely budgetary measure, which it wasn't either. It was a fiscal virility test and Gordon



Labour must treat the vested interests of the rich as ruthlessly as it has treated the poor Photographs: David Rose (left), PA

Brown demanded that Harriet Harman do it. All she could do was to force a deal out of him on child care, though the two are largely unconnected. The result was a bungle.

But now it is done and there is no going back. It is not the rebels that have caused the Government anxiety, but their own uneasy guilt. So what might Tony Blair do now to atone, communing with his soul in the watches of the night?

By a curious paradox, this affair that caught their consciences by surprise could give him and his government a new moral authority. It gives them a moral obligation to apply the same ruthlessness – or more – to those who drain away far more money than mothers and babies ever could. Now Mr Blair has earned the authority to set about the fat cats, the vested interests, the tax avoiders, the self-serving professions, the special pleaders and the cheats with new vigour. Now he can launch an assault on those who seek to protect their tax loopholes and unwarranted tax reliefs, leaching off the honest, taxpaying PAYE classes.

Now he has proved himself so merciless with the poor, he must be even cruder to the rich. No more hobnobbing with some dangerously unpleasant right-wingers. No more imag-

ining he can sit down at table with bad and corrupt people without contaminating himself. No more dining in the House of Levi the tax-gatherer – it is time to cast the usurers out of the temple instead.

First, no escape for those rich who call themselves self-employed and get away with paying only a fraction of the

**Blair has earned the authority to set about the fat cats, the tax avoiders, the special pleaders and the cheats**

national insurance contributions paid by PAYE drudges without clever accountants. That would bring in over £2bn. Then remove higher-rate tax relief on pensions for the best off: the rich need no extra incentives to save for their old age. That would bring in just under £1bn. Another £2bn could be saved by removing mortgage interest tax relief. More, too, by ending capital gains tax reliefs.

Too many escape the tax net by salting money away else-

where or nominally residing abroad. The one really good lesson from the US tax system is this: every citizen should be obliged to fill in a UK tax form wherever they are in the world and pay to Britain the difference between taxes they pay in other countries (or off-shore rocks) and the tax they would pay here. US citizens everywhere do it religiously or risk not getting their passport renewed.

How about a few more windfall taxes? What about unmerited fat cat salary rises? Or taxing corporations who pay virtually nothing by spreading themselves inscrutably around the globe? Why not start with Rupert Murdoch, who has paid so little British tax? Why not tackle his monstrous media monopoly now?

It is time, too, to stand up to the defence industry and cut back on the defence spending spree. We could save billions by halving the number of Euro-fighters we buy, reducing our commitment to the European average, the same level as the richer Germans.

All these things Mr Blair now has the right and the power to do. More than that, it is time he dared to tell the truth about public spending. We will never get the health, education or public transport we need until we have a leadership will-

ing to tell the voters that they can't have something for nothing. Even if we do squeeze the perks of the rich, that won't be enough. There has to be a new honesty in telling citizens that they will only get the quality of services they pay for. Public services are like shoes – cheap ones pinch and fall apart.

Something changed last week, making it easier to say these things. When I was talking about tax loopholes to several large accountancy and management consultancy firms (not natural allies of the poor), I was struck by how many spontaneously expressed shock at the lone parents benefit cut. This wasn't just a spasm within the Labour Party, it sparked off more widespread shame. Does the Government understand that? I fear they may think they have just scraped through this unfortunate episode, a passing blip. But everything else they now do will be judged by this low-water mark. Will they push ahead and take civil legal aid from the poor, while doing nothing about the ballooning lawyers' fees that caused the legal aid bill to burst in the first place? Lone parents will come back to haunt them on many "hard choice" issues unless the Government treats the vested interests of the rich as ruthlessly as they have treated the poor.

## Now for a short break from free speech



JOHN RENTOUL  
THE BAN ON  
'POLITICAL' ADS

We are careless about freedom of speech in this country. In the United States, they wrote it into their constitution. Amendment number one: "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech."

In Britain, we have a lazy assumption: that you can say what you like as long as it is not defamatory, or obscene, or an incitement to violence or racial hatred.

Well, you can in the limited sense that you can stand on a soapbox in Hyde Park or Brixton. But the First Amendment takes into account that, in order to disseminate information and opinion widely, you need something more expensive than a soap box. Hence the next clause, "... or of the press". And that has been interpreted by the American courts to mean freedom of access to all means of mass communication.

So, in the US, if enough people feel strongly enough about cancelling Third-World debt, they can club together to make a television commercial which tries to persuade their fellow citizens, and the American government, of the justice of their case.

In Britain, they cannot. Christian Aid has made a commercial which dramatises the effect of accumulated debt in poor countries. "The men we work for lend money to make money. You borrow, you pay it back," say the debt collectors (one white, one

black), as they take medicines, food and blankets from a Third-World baby.

The advert has been banned. "No advertisement may show partiality as respects matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy," says the TV Code of Advertising Standards and Practice.

Public controversy? What about adverts for Working-Out Barbie, the figure that launched a thousand columns of newspaper print?

Not that cancelling Third-World debt is that controversial. Most governments and international institutions agree reform is needed and talks are under way. Even Gordon Brown agrees with it. Although that might make it "party-political".

But then on those grounds, if a television commercial suggested that a brand of apple pie reminds you of the ones mother used to make, it would have to be banned. That kind of misty feelgood factor is, after all, one of the official objects of New Labour.

The rules governing what may be shown on television in between biased, controversial, political and generally offensive programmes are ridiculous. They date from the era, which ended in 1956, when all discussion of an issue that was due to come up in Parliament in the next 14 days was banned on television and radio.

They share the assumption

which runs through charity law that "politics" is controversial and dangerous, whereas caring for the poor is not. Which ended up in the anomaly of campaigning work by Oxford and War on Want being ruled "uncharitable" while private schools and political think-tanks of all stripes were granted tax-exempt status.

It is the definition of "political" that is wrong with the present rules for television advertising. It would not,

**In the US, if enough people have strong views about cancelling Third-World debt they can make a TV commercial to put their case**

clearly, be right to allow the Trades Union Congress to advertise on television in support of the Liberal Democrats, nor should big businesses be allowed to pay for racing cars to carry "Tony Blair" logos. But in no way can the Christian Aid advertisement be read as a call to "Vote Labour".

Or take the hunting issue. That was the subject of a free vote in the House of Commons. Why should the two sides not be allowed to make

their case – within the guidelines on taste and decency – on television, directly, without interviewers or producers shaping what they say and "ensuring balance"? Despite the parties hectoring the rise of single-issue pressure groups at the expense of conventional politics, they are precisely the groups who are not allowed to contribute directly to public debate on television. No doubt Greenpeace would still want to take direct action, get in the way of whaling ships and so on, because it is more fun than making commercials. But they should at least be allowed to do so.

Interestingly, Amnesty International last month won a High Court case against the Radio Authority to allow it to advertise – on the grounds that its activities are "humanitarian" rather than political.

But the rules are different for different media, and enforced by different quangos. Politics is allowed on billboards and in print, but subject to other rules, such as taste and decency, which are sometimes enforced erratically – and always after the event – by the Advertising Standards Authority. It ruled that the Conservative "demon eyes" advert attacking Tony Blair should not have been used because it portrayed him as "sinister and dishonest", whereas Labour's "two-faced" John Major escaped censure.

This patchwork quilt of

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Strapless evening dress, fall-winter collection 1997-98: black leather embroidered with Japanese characters. Courtesy Gianni Versace Archives



Evening gown, spring-summer 1994: orange and purple synthetic jersey. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Gianni Versace, 1996



Suit, fall-winter 1991-92: polychrome printed silk panna velvet. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Anne H. Bass, 1993



Evening dresses, fall-winter 1991-92: pink and pale blue quilted silk satin, silk georgette and lace. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Versace, 1993

## Rock 'n' roll and royalty

Stars attended a New York gala dinner in memory of Versace to raise money for the Metropolitan Museum. Christa Worthington watched the tribute to the man who broke the boundaries of fashion.



Paying tribute: Madonna, Donatella and Cher. Rex Features

The death of Italian fashion designer Gianni Versace, who was gunned down in Miami in July, injected enough life into the annual fundraising gala at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to raise the mummies in the museum's Temple of Dendur.

"I didn't want him to be remembered as the man who was murdered," explained Richard Martin, curator of the Costume Institute, about his decision to

mount the exhibit "Gianni Versace" in time to be held at the Institute's December ball. Hosted this year by Condé Nast and the cable channel VH1, among others, the gala is a highpoint of New York's social calendar. But with Versace as subject, the evening took on the urgency of

the Oscars. Seating at dinner sold for a record high of \$50,000 per table and the guest list, as well as the exhibit, testified to the designer's gift for making of high fashion rock 'n' roll. Sting performed instead of the usual string quartet; Elton John was a co-chairman, along with the de-

signer's sister and heir to his fashion signature, Donatella Versace; Madonna and Cher dined with the stars of fashion beneath balconies of lit candles, serenaded by a boy's choir from Harlem.

It was the least they could do for the man who forged an alliance between fashion, media and entertainment that has been mutually beneficial to all. "He made the Cinderella garments for our media world," said Martin to a platoon of furry mikes at the show's press preview. The Cinderella figure, of course, was Diana - a guest of honour at last year's ball. The beaded baby-blue Versace dress she wore on the cover of the September issue of *Harper's Bazaar* appears in the exhibit.

With 90 examples of Versace's important works, including the infamous "Elizabeth Hurley dress" held together, barely, by safety pins, the show sets out to establish him as one of the great dress-makers of the 20th century, a radical innovator attuned to history - to Vivienne Westwood and Madame Gres; to abstract and ancient art - not just rock 'n' roll. In the analytical light of the museum, removed from sensational photography or beautiful bodies, an item like the "Elizabeth Hurley dress" is revealed as a fashion idea - a little black dress in the manner of Chanel's that does her "poverty de luxe" one better with Punk iconography. "His gift was to be popular without ever being middle-class," said Martin.

Versace came of age in the Armani-soaked atmosphere of Milanese fashion in the Seventies, when sportswear of lanky unisex elegance made headlines. But sexiness of a sort unseen in polite company would become his signature: bondage dressing, transparency, sadomasochistic lacing and leather, and punk safety-pin closures that revealed skin at every opportunity. For him, sex was charm itself.

"He's the first post-Freudian fashion designer," observed Martin. "He's simply unashamed of any sexuality. Somewhere in the Eighties he had this ideal of the prostitute. In the same way Toulouse Lautrec had it. When everyone

else is looking to the street, he found the streetwalker. He transformed her, made her chic. It's really about saying sexuality is a force of identity, the same way contemporary culture is doing in the Eighties and Nineties." For men, too, he abhorred the convention of the business suit and preferred the look of South Beach bikers in lightweight clingy shirts.

"No one took him too seriously in the Eighties. He really takes off in the very late Eighties - in 1988 and 1989," said Martin of the moment Versace's image began to merge with that of his famous clients. *Rocks and Royalty* was the title of a picture book Versace produced, and he immersed himself in that equation as king and courtier, entertaining rock stars from Elton John to Bruce Springsteen in baroque palaces on Lake Como and South Beach. In the exhibit, the medieval wedding gown Versace made for Trudie Styler's 1992 marriage to Sting drips gemstone embroidery like the crown jewels of a media-made monarchy.

His white bouclé suit worn by Claudia Schiffer on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1995 appears in the show as the rare mainstream garment amid out-sized fantasy. Most of his clothes, even the simplest in silhouette, have an epic extravagance designed to catch some reflected glory, or light: opulent gold neo-classical and baroque celebrates immortality,

a quilted leather coat with a flared skirt is so pumped up as to seem airborne. Always erotic and hyperbolic, his mix of metaphor and material could be brutally surprising: a slip dress that looks featherweight is made of heavy metal; see-through mesh is a slip dress with embroidered leather.

In a section called "The Dream", his vision lifts off from reality altogether with theatre costume designed for opera and ballet - choreographers Twyla Tharp and Maurice Béjart. In his alliance with media, entertainment and the arts, Versace follows in the visionary tradition of Poiret, the fashion innovator of the early part of the century who collaborated with Diaghilev, the Ballets Russes and the musicians and artists of his time.

"Rock 'n' roll was just one of many interests," says the curator who grouped the clothes according to Versace's preoccupations: art, history, and experimental materials (plastic and leather). Mobile chiffon dresses move like Alexander Calder's sculptures, and Warhol-like silk screens of the faces of James Dean and Marilyn Monroe adorn an evening gown. Under the heading of "History", short slave-girl sheaths in aluminium mesh fall like Greek drapery but weigh 20 pounds and strike the pose, said Martin of "cheesy gladiator movies". Denim jackets are combined with 18th-century lace and silk skirts that refer to Versailles.



Hugh Grant arrives with Elizabeth Hurley. Rex Features

"I want to be remembered as a man who broke boundaries in fashion," Versace says to the camera in a video accompanying the exhibit that now resonates as every prophecy. "I try to make people beautiful and happy." His complex legacy has only begun to be considered. In July, the first biography of the late designer is due from Little Brown & Co and writer Christopher Mason; he scored

a \$500,000 contract and is writing without co-operation from the Versace family.

The Costume Institute's exhibit, according to the curator, is likely to travel to London, Paris and Tokyo.

The Gianni Versace exhibition is at The Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (00 1 212 570 3711) until 22 March 1998

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This man then might like to contribute to magazine and would drop in dummy issue was obviously ruse to get his house and meet our charisma



# Prattling on through thick and thin (mostly thin)

When your career and fame have been built on your looks, it is hard to let them go. Britt's trying to hang on in there. She's had an eye-job, she doesn't smoke, doesn't drink and she's lost interest in sex. And she's skinny. She doesn't seem very happy though.

So, to the Chichester Festival Theatre where Britt Ekland is rehearsing *Mother Goose*. Britt is playing Demoness Vanity – appropriately enough, some might say – and is having a problem getting the lines right. Britt needs a lot of prompting. Britt says to me later: "If I were clever, I would do the same panto every year like Lesley Joseph. But I guess I like a challenge."

Britt breaks for lunch. Britt has brought in her own lunch. Britt's lunch is six sticks of carrot and two of celery. Let me tell you how fat Britt is. Stick her in your hall and visitors would hang their coats on her. Britt had some hot water with half a lemon squeezed into it for breakfast. I don't think Britt ever has much fun at the pick 'n' mix counter down Woolworths, frankly. Britt, do you ever think, blow it, I'm going to have a Twix today, and that's that? "No," she replies. "Or, if I ever do, I kill it. Kill it!"

I don't think Britt has much fun, full-stop, anymore. Maybe life has sucked her dry. Or perhaps she's sucked life dry. Whatever, she doesn't seem to have much of an appetite left. Sex, Britt? Still having loads of it? "No. Not interested," she replies. "Perhaps it's age. I don't know." A drink, Britt, shall we go for a drink? She used to like wine, she says. And champagne, of course. But not anymore. "I've discovered I'm allergic to grapes." Fag, Britt? "No, and if you could blow your smoke the other way..."

She's been around a long time, of course. She was 19 when she first came to Britain, and is now 55. She's had loads of men. Peter Sellers. Rod Stewart. George Hamilton. Warren Beatty. Lord Lichfield. Jim McDonnell. And Ryan O'Neal, although he doesn't properly count because "it was only a one-night stand". She's made loads of films, too, but no one can ever remember any of those. Britt wouldn't be Britt if anyone could. Although, that said, there was *The Wicker Man*, a spooky job co-starring Edward Woodward which was quite good, as it happens. "I wasn't naked in that," she says. I never said you were. I say, "I mean, it wasn't me naked. It was a double. My own bottom's much nicer." Good. That's settled then. "My own tits, though," she adds. "I had very good tits then."

When your career and fame have been built on your looks, it must be hard to let those looks go. Certainly, Britt's trying to hang on in there. She's had an eye-job. No, she wouldn't go out without full make-up on. No, she'd never nip to the shops in popsocks. Or Dr Scholls. Or both. She'll be having a face-lift next year. I say, please don't. Face-lifts always make women look as if they're being sucked up by a Hoover from behind. A few wrinkles are much sexier. "But it's so hard when you see women like Goldie Hawn going about looking like they're 25," she moans. True, I say. But Helen Mirren looks her age and every man I know wants to sleep with her. "That's because she looks slutty," says Britt. "Plus, did you see her in *Painted Lady*? She wore a stud in her nose which was not a good idea because it made her nose look bigger. Nice cowboy boots, though. I'd like to know where those came from."

Britt is summoned back to rehearse. Her scenes with Sherrie Hewson (Maureen from *Coronation Street*) need polishing up. Britt doesn't really know who Maureen is because she doesn't watch *Coronation Street*. "I like *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*," Britt is told she's going to have to sing and dance with the rest of the troupe to come the finale. Britt says: "I didn't know I'd have to do this much." The company manager says: "You are in a good panto, this year, Britt." Britt says she's only ever done good pantos, as it happens. "My first one had huge stars in it. It had Danny La Rue, Brian Conley and Michael Elphick." Does she enjoy panto. "I love it," she says half-heartedly. Is it well paid? "Very," she adds with more conviction.

Does she need to work? Absolutely, she says. She only kept going last year because she sold off a lot of memorabilia at Christie's and made \$146,000. She's got to keep the money coming in somehow. Thankfully, she knows her limitations. "I'm not exceptionally talented. I'm no Vanessa Redgrave. I'm not going to get a Checkov or a Shakespeare. Although, I did do *Run For Your Wife*, and would like to do something like that again."

The company manager says she can now have a couple of hours off, so long as she's back for a costume fitting at 4pm. We decide to go into town, to look round the shops. First off, we pass a children's clothes shops. There are some incredibly cute, lit-



Britt's day: (clockwise from top left) looking at herself as a Bond babe; resplendent in her panto costume; rehearsing with Sherrie Hewson; munching on a carrot for lunch

Photos: Emma Boam



## DEBORAH ROSS TALKS TO BRITT EKLAND

the flower-print dresses in the window. I stop to "ooh" and "ah" and say having girls is so much better than having boys, because the clothes are so much dinkier. It's worth having a daughter just for the swimsuits. Britt says: "Of course, when Victoria was little, she was always in Pierre Cardin or real Dior." Lucky Victoria. Or not, judging by how things turned out.

Victoria, of course, is Britt's daughter by Peter Sellers. Britt met Sellers in the Dorchester when she was 19 and married him 10 days later. "Brin's a mixture of Loren and Bardot and Ekberg," babbed an excited Sellers on their wedding day. Three weeks later, he suffered his first heart attack. Her appetite might have been quite something back then.

Victoria was born when Britt was 20.

Victoria was largely bought up in hotel suites by nannies. Victoria has since taken drugs, posed naked for *Playboy*, worked as a hooker and served time in jail. I ask Britt if Victoria's troubles are her way of saying: "Hey! Remember me, mum? I exist." Britt says no, absolutely not. "It was Peter who could have been more caring." Peter made Britt lead the lifestyle they did, she continues. "He made me neglect my inner duties. I have always put men first. I have always been a giver rather than a taker." Even in bed? Yes. My problem has always been that I give too much. "She always gives a good account of herself, does Britt. She concludes: "I am first and foremost a mother. I should have been a big earth mother, really."

A year ago, she moved from London to LA to be nearer her children. Aside from Victoria, there is Nikolai, her son by Lou Adler, and TJ, her son by Jim McDonnell, the drummer with Stray Cats. Nikolai is grown up and the manager of a band while TJ is still only nine. TJ will be spending Christmas in LA with Jim. No, Britt won't miss him too much. "Pantomime is very demanding. You don't have time to think of anything else." She's bought him a game for his Sony Playstation for Christmas. Victoria wants gym shoes. (Victoria's fine now, yes. "She's lost a lot of weight and has regained her dignity.") Nikolai's getting a photo frame with a picture of her in it. Brin doesn't expect to get anything. She'll be spending Christmas alone in her rented house in Chichester. How sad, I say. "It'll be OK," she shrugs. Perhaps she's going to treat herself to a lick of a Rytiva. Perhaps she is looking forward to that.

I wonder, what was Britt's own childhood like? Her mother, Marie-Britt, was a housewife, she says, while her father, Sven, owned a clothes store before going

bust and ending up secretary to the national curling team. I ask her what it was like growing up in Sweden. Did all your furniture come flat-packed for self-assembly? "No, my parents had very good taste. Our furniture was all antique," she exclaims, offended. Britt's sense of humour is sometimes not all it might be. It can be quite touching.

Her mother was a devoted wife while her father was something of a playboy. "He was tall and blonde and blue-eyed and very handsome and very Swedish." Her father

I wonder, if she could come back in a next life, would she choose to come back as a great beauty? Or would she come back more as someone like me, with bags of personality? "A beauty, definitely," she replies a bit too quickly for my liking. "There are a lot of advantages. I'm Libra and very pleased by beauty. I like beautiful clothes, beautiful people, beautiful children. It pleases me to look good. I get pleasure from it. The other night I went to a charity premiere. I chose my clothes. I laid out my stockings. I did my hair. I enjoyed it. It's

## 'I am first and foremost a mother. I should have been a big earth mother, really'

had mistresses, yes, "although I didn't find that out until I was 16, 17, and then I got mad and didn't talk to him for a long time." Previously, her father had doted on her. As the only girl (Britt has three brothers who still live in Sweden) she was his darling. "He took me everywhere with him. To the racetrack and curling meetings and, later, when I got to 14 and started being pretty, to dinners and parties." So he could show you off? "Yes." Did this, I ask, set a pattern for your later relationships with men? You know, find someone dashing then dangle off their arm? Absolutely not, she insists. All her men have been famous because "I was incredibly beautiful, and beautiful people mix with beautiful people. Look at Naomi Campbell. She's dated everyone famous there is." She can be quite bitchy. No, Patsy and Liam are not the Britt and Rod of the Nineties. "Liam's ugly, whereas Rod is not."

like building something." She might come flat-packed for self-assembly herself, now I think about it.

We nip into M&S because Britt needs new underwear. She finally chooses two bras and some of those pants that keep your tummy in. Britt, I say, you have no tummy to keep in. You are tummyless. You are without tummy. If my tummy were to stand next to your tummy, my tummy would say: "Hello? Anybody there?"

She says if I want a figure like hers then I must never eat proteins with starches and must never have any bread or anything with sugar in and "are you writing this down?". She adds: "A girlfriend of mine went on this diet and lost 35lbs in five weeks." She buys her pants and bras. We move on to a bookshop. No, Britt is not a great reader herself. "I don't read fiction, if that's what you mean. Although I have loads of books on nutrition and how the body works." She is look-

ing for a Christmas present for the company manager. She finds a book about Bond Girls. Britt played Bond babe Mary Goodnight in the 1974 Bond film *The Man With the Golden Gun*. There's a big picture of Brin on page 47, in a skimpy white bikini. Truly, she was utterly divine. What does she think when she looks at it. "I think one of the bikini straps is twisted. And that annoys me."

She does seem to have developed the tendencies of someone who can't be bothered with people any more. She loves animals. Everytime we pass a dog in the street she goes: "Ohhh, look at that sweet little doggie." She is obsessively houseproud. Washing up has to be done straight away. Her bed must be made first thing. She likes to iron. "I love to get crisp corners." No, she won't be trying on her bras and pants when she gets home. "I'll have to wash them first." But why, I cry? They're new! "People may have fingered them in the shop," she shudders. I say in my house the only clean things are new things. Once they go into the washing machine that's it, they're grey. She looks horrified. But, then, with the eye-job and everything, she always looks a bit horrified. It's the price you have to pay. Anyway, it's 4pm so back to the theatre for the costume fitting. Britt nips to the Ladies with Natasha, the seamstress, to try the frock on. "Are you decent, Britt?" we all chorus before we charge in. The dress is fab. It's black and green and purple with feathers here and tassels there and little jewels stuck on. Natasha, though, is busy pinning the back because, she says, Britt's lost weight since the last fitting. "Do you hear that everyone! I've lost weight!" whoops Britt. And, for the first time in eight hours, she looks truly animated and happy.

*'Mother Goose' opens at the Chichester Festival Theatre on Thursday and runs until 17 January (booking: 01243 781312)*



## DINAH HALL

This man thought I might like to contribute to the magazine and would drop in a dummy issue. It was obviously a ruse to get into my house and measure our charisma rating

Very worried about the children's charisma this week, following telephone conversation with a man who is starting up a smart parenting magazine. None of the really good children's photographers will work for any of the parenting magazines, he explains, because the children in them aren't "charismatic" enough. He himself is the father of a four-month-old, so of course he has a good few years of charisma ahead of him

while the infant will go along with being dressed up in adorable little items from Gap. We dressed our first born in clothes that were three sizes too big for him – big baggy rolled-up trousers and big baggy jumpers with rolled-up sleeves. Sweet. Looking back, of course, we now realise that this was why he didn't walk until he was nearly two years old: his trousers kept tripping him up. Anyway, this man thought I

might like to contribute to the magazine and would drop in a dummy issue. Complete panic – it was obviously a ruse to get in to my house and measure our charisma rating. I looked at my children. Pyjama bottoms topped with grubby T-shirts, drinking chocolate moustaches for the little ones, a real one for the 13-year-old. How have I let standards slip so far? And since when was it OK for five-year-olds to eat whole packets of

cough sweets before breakfast? When I confiscated them she said she "100 per cent hated me", which rather cheered me up – I mean five is very young to have grasped complex mathematical concepts. My sense of failure and general pre-Christmas gloom is heightened by pictures in magazines of angelic children in clean white T-shirts making icing biscuit decorations to hang on the tree while their gorgeous mothers, also

dressed in white, string dried red chillis on to thin gold wire to festoon from the mantelpiece. I am resolved not to give in to the red chilli aesthetic. I laughed at them two years ago and lusted after them last year, so feel sure that with a little help from my Martha Stewart *Living* magazines I should be able to come up with something a little more next year, a little more – yes, charismatic. Aubergines tied with gold ribbon? Too heavy.

Popcorn sprayed to look like gold nuggets? Possibly. Potatoes? I always loved that fairy-story about a family who were so poor they only had potatoes to hang on the tree. The children were so humble and thrilled that a fairy came along and turned them into diamonds. Feel sure there is a moral here – or at least a decorating idea. Baby new potatoes, soil still clinging to them, dusted with gold leaf? You saw it here first.







## Order-driven system looks set to dampen Footsie's festive surge

## WEEK AHEAD



DEREK PAIN

Stock markets make a habit of wroog footing investors - big and small. In recent years the run up to Christmas has been a merry affair with shares romping ahead in the second half of December.

This year, despite the Asian turmoil which put Footsie under some pressure last week, the index made remarkable progress in the opening weeks of the month, scoring a 213.4 points gain.

So has the Christmas share rally already come and gone? A festive run in the second half of the month has only failed to occur since 1980. So history would suggest blue chips will continue their December romp.

But this will be the first Christmas of order-driven trading. And the heavily criticised system, which is viewed as a disastrous development by many market professionals,

could tilt the balance against the tradition continuing.

After all, much of the Christmas fun and games was accomplished in very thin trading. And with many top executives at the leading City firms away over the long holiday period those left minding the shops were inclined to buy rather than sell.

So a few days in a market drifting doily had an inspirational, snowballing impact. Although 60 per cent of blue-chip turnover is conducted off the order book, the very presence of the computerised system may, just, inhibit the easy going holiday approach.

The early December run has caught out many strategists. The general view was that following the October peak blue chips would turn in a mundane performance in the final quarter of 1997. Even arch bull Boh Semple and his team at

NatWest Securities settled for Footsie at 4,800 points at the year-end. He may still be right - but clearly he did not factor in the early December cheer.

With the Christmas high street spending spree slow to develop there are growing signs that the consumer party is over. Nick Bubb at Société Générale Strauss Turnbull is one cautious about retail growth. Although Christmas is late arriving in the shops few doubt that the nation's retailers are in for another lucrative spell. But next year could be sluggish with few windfalls and higher interest rates taking their toll.

Even so, the market bulls are out in force. Mr Semple is on 5,700 points for the end of next year and is prepared to wager that Footsie will greet the millennium at 7,000. Taking a line through the various 1998 forecasts would suggest

Footsie will end the year at 5,475.

The hazards of predicting anything so wayward as a share market is illustrated by last year's estimates. Among strategists Mr Semple was top of the range with what at the time seemed a brave 4,600 prediction. It was later raised to 4,800.

International influences,

particularly of a Far Eastern origin, will undoubtedly take their toll in the months ahead. And higher US interest rates are likely in the next few months.

The British economy, however, seems set fair, although sterling remains a worry.

Old-fashioned market fundamentals look good. Share buy-backs, yet more on the way, are pumping cash into the system and in many takeover bids cash, rather than equity, is king. New issues and rights calls are not particularly prevalent and are not, therefore, draining away much of the market's surplus cash.

Institutional coffers are also overflowing. So far some, like PDM and Gartmore, have resisted the call of equities, moving instead into cash. They could eventually see the error of their ways.

It is often said that the

monthly Merrill Lynch survey of fund managers' intentions indicates the reverse of what they really think. It could then be significant that the latest poll suggested most managers were not keen to increase their exposure to shares. Another point in the market's favour is it is still cheap on the international Richter scale and therefore attractive to overseas investors.

Of course, the bears still hover. Perennial pessimist David Schwartz is one caught on the hop by the long-running bull market. In his latest newsletter he says: "We believe the 1994-97 bull market is over. It ended on October 3 when Footsie peaked at 5,330."

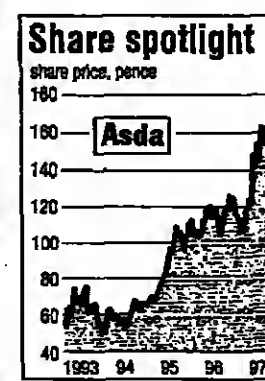
He points out that shares went on to fall 6.6 per cent in October, the 12th largest decline. "History warns of high odds that more falls are coming in the months ahead."

Asda, the superstore chain, heads this week's results. Interim figures are due on Thursday and around £180m against £160m is expected.

Comments on current trading will be closely scanned and there will be keen interest in what, if anything, chairman Archie Norman has to say about struggling rivals, Sainsbury's.

Talk Asda is planning a takeover bid has swirled around; there is little doubt that with Sainsbury's shares still feeling the impact of last month's surprise profit warning the group is vulnerable.

MFI, the flat-pack furniture group, should produce slightly higher interim profits of £34m today but tomorrow Securicor is likely to offer year's profits down by £3.9m to £103m. Also tomorrow Greenall's, the pubs chain where bid talk hovers, should roll out year's figures of £158m (£149m).



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Alumina	30.00	+0.10	+1.2	100
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FINANCIAL JOURNAL OF THE YEAR

## Benefit payment system delayed by two years

One of the biggest projects ever awarded under the Government's Private Finance Initiative - a £1.5bn contract awarded to ICL in 1986 to computerise benefit payments at post offices - is running two years behind schedule.

Michael Harrison reports on why only 40,000 claimants will be using the new system by March 1998, the date it was to be available to 19 million claimants nationwide.

The project to automate social security payments to 19 million claimants, using a credit-card system to replace order books and Girocheques, was due to be ready by next year. However, the national roll-out across the Post Office's 19,000 outlets will not now be complete until the year 2000 at the earliest.

The information technology group ICL was awarded the contract by the Benefits Agency in May 1996 after beating off fierce competition from two rival bids, one from IBM and the other from a consortium of Cardlink, Andersen Consulting and Unisys.

At the time, ICL and its partners - the Benefits Agency and the Post Office - forecast that the new automated service would virtually eliminate fraudulent encashment from the system, saving the taxpayer around £150m a year.

The plan had been to go on national with the system within 18 months, replacing 1 billion physical benefit transactions a year with a swipe of the card.

However, the partners took a decision in the run-up to the election to delay the phased introduction of the system. One very small scale trial involving 1,500 claimants and 10 post offices in Stroud, Gloucestershire, was conducted between October 1996 and March of this year.

A second trial involving 205 post offices in the South-west and the North-east began last April. But by March 1998 there will still only be 40,000 claimants using the system.

Although it is claimed the system will eradicate £150m in fraud a year, the Department of Social Security has incurred extra costs in consolidating all its benefit payments on to one central database which is compatible with the new Post Office automation system. One estimate puts the extra cost as high as £200m.

A spokeswoman for ICL Pathway, the ICL subsidiary set up to manage the project, said the decision to delay the full roll-out had been taken because of the scale of the project. She added that it was important to make sure the system worked effectively because those relying upon it were some of the most vulnerable groups in society, such as the elderly, disabled and unemployed.

Initially, the card system is being used to replace child benefit payment books, but ultimately it will be used to pay everything from pensions and disability allowance to unemployment and housing benefit.

The card has a magnetic strip which contains details of the benefit claimant and how much they are entitled to. Each card will only work at one nominated post office. When the card is swiped the system may throw up a random question to check the identity of the person claiming the benefit. They may, for instance, be asked the number of the street in which they live or other personal details.

ICL has to bear the cost of any losses incurred if the technology does not operate properly or a way is found to forge the cards or get around security systems. But the Benefits Agency is liable if it is paying benefits to authorised card holders to which they are not entitled.

ICL said it was not aware that any problems had been encountered with the system during trials or that it was paying out incorrect amounts. The spokeswoman added that there may have been instances of fraud, but this was a matter for the Benefits Agency.

ICL Pathway's subcontractors on the project include Girobank, the printing group De La Rue, Microsoft and An Post, the Irish Post Office, which is providing consultancy on counter automation.



Reaching its reserve price: Christie's board met last night to decide on the revised offer

## Christie's to go under the hammer for £500m

Christie's International will this week respond to a £500m bid from SBC Warburg Dillon Read, the Swiss investment bank, in conjunction with Joe Lewis, the Bahamas-based billionaire who holds a 29.6 per cent stake in the auctioneer. As Andrew Verity reports, the board is expected to accept the offer.

The board of Christie's met last night to decide on the unprecedented offer, which would see the top auction house valued at more than £500m, up from £385m just 10 days ago.

The meeting followed confirmation from Christie's last Wednesday that it was considering a revised offer for the company. Five days before, the auctioneer announced it was rejecting an initial bid on the grounds that it was not in the interests of shareholders. While Christie's did not disclose the identity of the original bidder, it is believed that SBC Warburg Dillon Read made an earlier, lower offer.

SBC Warburg Dillon Read, which yesterday declined to comment, is thought to be offering 300p a share for the business. Two unnamed Christie's directors, one of whom bought 5,000 shares in December while the other bought 10,000 shares in May, are set to gain over £100,000 each from the sale.

Brian Keelan, the SBC corporate financier arranging the deal, is known to be keen to retain Christopher Davidge, Christie's chief executive. Joe Lewis, one of the 10 richest British people, will pledge his stake and give undertakings to SBC.

The deal will give Christie's access to SBC's client-base of thousands of high-net worth individuals. It will also allow it to steal a march on its rival, Sotheby's, by using SBC's financial muscle to underwrite auctions of valuable art collections.

Auction houses are increasingly being forced by their customers to guarantee a minimum price on items being auctioned. Christie's has seen business mushroom in the last year as it outbid Sotheby's on minimum prices. Last year, Christie's auc-

tioned fine art worth just over £1bn, topping Sotheby's sales for the first time in 40 years and boosting sales on the previous year by more than 15 per cent.

The company recently offered a minimum price of \$130m for the collection of the Ganz family in an underwritten auction, which in the event fetched \$206m. After shareholders marked up the company, it was forced to warn the market it did not expect to make huge profits from the sale.

In contrast, Sotheby's, irritated at Christie's winning bid to sell the Ganz collection, tried the same gamble and failed. It offered a minimum of \$55m for the collection of Evelyn Sharp, the American property magnate, which later fetched just \$41.3m.

## Westminster Health Care gains 16% of Tamaris

Westminster Health Care, the UK's second-largest quoted nursing home company, is to take a 16 per cent stake in Tamaris, the fourth-largest company, as part of its plans to set up a US-style nursing home property finance company.

As part of a package of deals which will double its size, Tamaris will announce today that it has bought 12 nursing homes from Westminster worth £20m. Tamaris will sell and immediately lease back and operate five of these homes from a new nursing home property company, Atlantic Healthcare Fund, set up jointly by Westminster and its former partner, Holiday Retirement of the US.

Atlantic Healthcare is being established as a rival to Omega, the huge US sale-and-leaseback nursing home specialist. Sale-and-leaseback financing means operators manage, but do not own, nursing home assets, and is proving highly profitable.

Tamaris will run the other seven Westminster homes through a similar arrangement with a property fund managed by Hamilton Corporate Finance. Tamaris will also announce today it has been appointed as sole operator of 70 of Omega's nursing homes. The Westminster and Omega deals more than double Tamaris' nursing home beds to 5,000.

The deal with Tamaris will involve Westminster buying £500,000 worth of Tamaris' ordinary shares at 2.75p, 38 per cent above Tamaris' 2p closing price on Friday, and \$4m of its 7.2 per cent convertible and preference shares, together equivalent to around 16-17 per cent of Tamaris' equity. Westminster is expected to announce in the next few weeks that it is selling another £20m of its homes to Atlantic, freeing up cash to expand its interest in psychiatric care.

- Sameena Ahmad

## Newspapers to lobby OFT over predatory pricing

Owners of national newspapers are to ask the Office of Fair Trading to give a fresh opinion on the issue of predatory pricing as part of a campaign to strengthen competition rules. Telegraph Publishing, the Guardian Media Group and Newspaper Publishing, which owns *The Independent*, are seeking to meet John Bridgeman, the director-general of the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), to ask for his guidance on predatory pricing. The proprietors want the OFT to update its 1994 opinion that a price cut should be seen as a short-term marketing ploy. Jeremy Reed, managing director of Newspaper Publishing, said: "The Times is still operating what we believe is a predatory pricing policy. At the moment the only way to prove predatory pricing is when you go under. The rules are not strong enough and in our opinion, this can't continue." Newspaper owners are also pressing the House of Lords to pass an amendment to the Competition Bill currently going through Parliament.

## Train firms under fire

John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, is considering referring three train leasing companies to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Stagecoach, Eversholt and Angel have come under fire for allegedly failing to compete effectively. Fees for rail leasing make up a third of the costs of the rail operating companies which run privatised train services.

## Eastern woos new custom

Eastern Group has launched an offer to cut the bills of customers who switch suppliers for the first time by at least 20 per cent. Gas customers will save at least £100 a year on a £500 bill, while households switching to electricity will get back at least £50. The company, formerly known as Eastern Electricity, is aiming to supply six million homes nationwide before the year 2000. With 450,000 switchers already on board, the company is now targeting its price in the Hull and Chester areas.

## Aon to bid for Sedgwick

Aao Corporation, the giant US insurance broker, is expected this week to bid over £1bn for Sedgwick Group, an international broker which is also the largest benefits consultancy in the UK. The bid will accelerate consolidation in the UK insurance broking industry, which has seen a string of mergers in the last year. Aon, the second-largest broker in the world, has been behind many of them, including the recent purchase of Bain Hogg and Godwins Group. While many large insurance brokers are barely making a profit, Aon and Sedgwick's both own cash-rich employee benefit consultancies. Industry sources yesterday said any bid for Sedgwick by Aon would lead to pressure to sell the benefit consulting wings, Sedgwick Noble Lowndes and Aon Consulting.

## New chief for Care First

Care First, the nursing home operator, is set to announce the appointment of a new chief executive as part of its defence against a £241m bid from Bupa. As *The Independent* revealed last month, the company has appointed a relative unknown, Gerard Wainwright, formerly managing director of Nesbitt Evans, the medical products group to the job.

## Agency challenges water bill cuts

The dispute over cuts in water bills planned by the industry regulator will intensify this week when the Environment Agency releases a wide-ranging consumer survey which will show customers would prefer to see money spent on environmental improvements. But as Chris Godsmark, Business Correspondent, reports the regulator is standing firm over his proposals.

The opinion poll research commissioned by the Environment Agency, the independently run body responsible for monitoring pollution and water quality, is expected to endorse overwhelmingly its claim that consumers would like more funds poured into discretionary improvement schemes.

The evidence gained from surveys of more than a thousand households, to be

released on Wednesday, will be used by the agency to support its argument with Ian Byatt, the regulator, over the shape of the next five-year price formula which starts in 2000.

Mr Byatt wants to see a big, one-off cut in bills, similar to that imposed this year on the pipeline network of the former British Gas, to make up for low investment and big dividend increases by the privatised water groups.

The agency is preparing a shopping list of extra environmental improvements for the next price control, including additional spending on sewer overflows and reducing river extractions. Ed Gallagher, the agency's chief executive, believes the cash gained from these price cuts would be better spent on the environment, a battle his predecessor lost to Mr Byatt in the early 1990s in a high-profile feud.

Yesterday the agency declined to speculate on the results of the survey. However, it is thought to support "very strongly" Mr Gallagher's argument. The water companies

are hacking the agency's case, though critics argue they prefer higher investment spending because they can find further cost savings from their budgets to pay out as dividends.

The debate will ultimately go to John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, who has influence over how many of the improvement schemes are included in customer bills. However, Mr Byatt has sought to stamp his authority on the review, insisting that he has the final say over the way the price formula is calculated.

He said a fortnight ago that he did not believe Mr Prescott would attempt to force the regulator to abandon the principle of a big one-off price cut. "That's not what he will do because it's not proper or appropriate," said Mr Byatt.

The regulator said the price cut related to efficiency gains made during the current five-year formula. "That's my job and I must be able to do that independently. If I'm not able to do that then you've lost independent regulation," added Mr Byatt.

## KPMG reports 17 per cent rise in revenues ahead of merger with Ernst & Young

KPMG, the UK accounting and consulting firm planning to merge with fellow Big Six practice Ernst & Young, will report today that it has produced its best fee performance of the decade, with gross revenues up 17 per cent at £726m. Roger Tropp reports.

Mike Rake, chief operating officer at KPMG, pointed to the fact distributable profit had risen 25 per cent to £145m and said the figures showed the merger was being developed from a position of strength. Ernst & Young recently produced figures revealing fees up 15 per cent at £525m.

Moreover, KPMG's profit per partner of £256,000 was broadly in line with the £259,000 reported by E&Y last month, though Mr Rake acknowledged that the spread of earnings was greater at KPMG, with Colin Sharman, KPMG's senior part-

ner, earning considerably more than Nick Land, his counterpart at E&Y. This was being dealt with as the merger proposal was developed, he added.

Today's figures from KPMG come in what it says is the first preliminary announcement by a leading accountancy firm. Mr Sharman described it as "a further indication of our openness and desire to demonstrate complete financial transparency". Full audited accounts for the year ending 30 September 1997 - showing the pay of Mr Sharman and his senior colleagues - will be included in the firm's annual report to be published early in the new year.

Much of the improvement was down to a 36 per cent rise in revenue, to £153m, from management consulting. This amounted to a turnaround, since last year this part of the business had repaid a decline in fees while it invested in changing its focus.

However, tax had another strong year, with fees 17 per cent ahead at £152m, while transaction services, such as due diligence work connected with

the buoyant activity in mergers and acquisitions, also grew strongly.

Finally, said Mr Rake, while investment, especially in consulting had paid off, overheads had been kept under tight control, particularly in London and the South-east.

Though he was worried about the potential impact of the turbulence in the Far East combining with difficulties in other parts of the world, he said that growth had held up since the end of the year.

Mr Sharman repeated one of the justifications for the planned merger by saying that the firm might have reported even stronger growth had it not been for "the constraint on human resources". He said: "Our clients have placed great demands on new and existing services and the level of fee and profit growth has been justly rewarding. It is interesting to note that both ourselves and Ernst & Young have produced very strong growth and this gives me confidence that our merged firm will grow at an even greater pace."

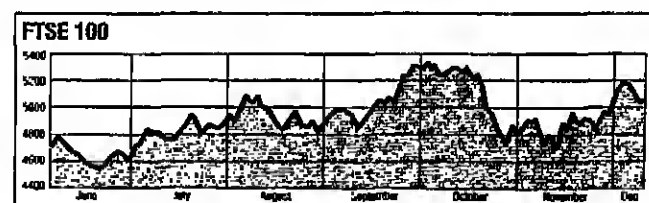
## Coats Viyella set to demerge

Coats Viyella, Britain's biggest textile group, is to announce this week that it is splitting itself into two. At a pre-Christmas trading statement, Sir David Alliance, Coats' chairman, will announce that his struggling company is demerging its clothing and textiles division, which includes the Jaguar fashion brand, Dorma home furnishings and the contract clothing business supplying Marks & Spencer, from its engineering and metals precision components, which he worth some £400m.

Analysts believe a split could create more than £300m in value for shareholders. Shares in Coats, which currently valued at £714m, are near a 10-year low, as the company has struggled in competitive markets. Those close to the company agree with estimates that Coats' clothing and textiles side could be valued at around £650m as a separate company while Dynacast, which makes plastic and metal precision components, could be worth some £400m. It is thought that Michael Ost, Coats' chief executive, will run the engineering company.

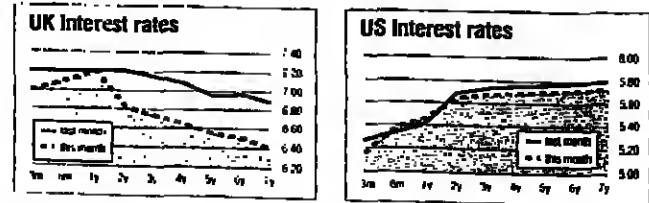
- Sameena Ahmad

## STOCK MARKETS



Indices	Close	Wk's chg	Wk's chg %	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield %
FTSE 100	5045.20	-97.70	-1.90	5367.3	3833.9	3.485
FTSE 250	4757.90	6.60	0.14	4963.8	4347.3	3.484
FTSE 350	2431.70	-37.30	-1.51	2570.5	1958.1	3.492
FTSE All Share	2875.46	-33.87	-1.17	2907.68	1948.17	3.49
FTSE SmallCap	2300.80	-4.10	-0.18	2407.4	2127.5	3.483
FTSE FTSE100	1253.00	-4.50	-0.36	1346.5	1052.2	3.421
FTSE AIM	974.80	-1.10	-0.11	1138	955.9	1.108
Dow Jones	7838.30	-310.83	-3.81	8299.03	6236.05	1.741
Nikkei	15904.30	-520.18	-3.17	20910.79	14966.13	0.871
Hang Seng	10814.66	-812.94	-7.92	16820.31	8775.88	3.996
Dax	4082.60	-87.48	-2.10	4459.89	2797.54	1.986

## INTEREST RATES

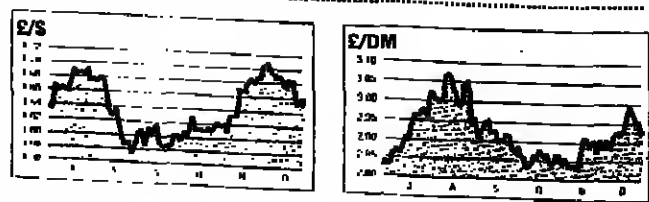


Money Market Rates	3 month	6 month	9 month	1 year	Bond Yields	1 year	Long bond	1 year
UK	7.75	1.34	7.81	0.92	6.27	-1.41	6.20	-1.61
US	5.91	0.36	6.01	0.25	5.73	-0.64	5.93	-0.64
Japan	0.77	0.31	0.72	0.14	1.90	-0.76	2.56	-0.73
Germany	3.76	0.52	4.07	0.77	5.29	-0.58	5.86	-0.53

## MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Rises	Price (pt)	Wk's chg	% chg	Falls	Price (pt)	Wk's chg	% chg
Christies Int	300.00	-81	20.24	Inchcape	178.50	-27	-15.20
Halma	117.50	-16	13.53	Ionica Grp	89.00	-12	-13.17
Silkyharma	55.50	-7	12.27	Reuners Hldgs	643.00	-77	-12.10
Wills Cannon	141.50	-19	13.20	Railtrack	955.00	-117	-11.55

## CURRENCIES



£/\$	Friday	Wk's chg	Yr Ago	\$/£	Friday	Wk's chg	Yr Ago
Dollar	1.6500	-0.77c	1.6561	Sterling	0.6051	+0.28c	0.6038
D-Mark	2.9315	-2.36p	2.5518	D-Mark	1.7717	-1.02p	1.5418
Yen	215.21	-10.71	188.58	Yen	130.36	+10.31	113.88
£ index	103.70	-0.60	93.10	£ index	108.30	-0.10	98.10

## OTHER INDICATORS

	Chng	Wk's chg	Yr Ago	Index	Chg	Yr Ago	Next Day
Brent Oil (\$)	17.04	-0.91	22.42	GDP	113.90	3.80	109.7
Gold (\$)	282.85	-5.60	388.85	RPI	159.80	3.7	153.91
Silver (\$)	5.79	0.48	4.83	Base Rates	7.25	6.00	

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source: Bloomberg

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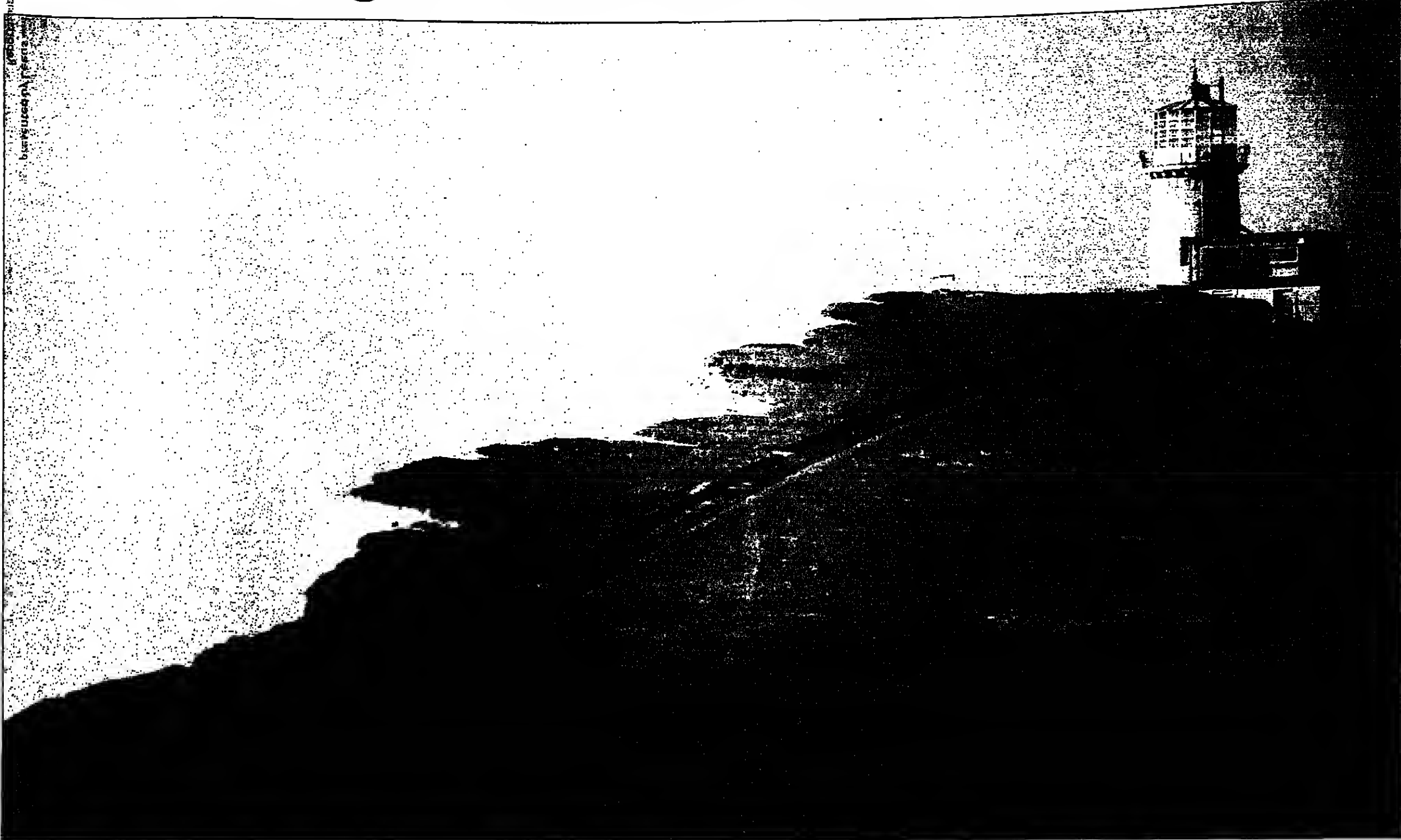
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## Life on the edge in home that needs a quick move



On shaky ground: Belle Tout lighthouse at Beachy Head, East Sussex. Its owners fear that further erosion of the cliff by winter gales could result in the rock sheering off and plunging into the sea.

Photograph: Andrew Haxson

Belle Tout, a 19th century lighthouse, is in danger of plunging over the chalk cliffs by Beachy Head. Stephen Goodwin reports on one couple's novel attempt to get their precarious home moved 70 feet inland.

Mark and Louise Roberts are praying for unusually calm seas off Sussex this winter. Erosion has brought the edge of the overhanging cliff to within 30ft of their lighthouse. If the south-westerlies which hammer up the English Channel undercut more of the chalk, Belle Tout may not survive.

"It's an eerie experience. You can hear the dull thud as

each wave hits the cliff," said Mr Roberts, a former hotelier who moved into the lighthouse a year ago.

The building, with its 45ft lamp tower abutting a two-storey house, is a familiar sight to walkers between Beachy Head and Birling Gap. But what is not visible from the path is the extent to which the sea has undercut the 330ft cliff.

Mr Roberts reckons that if a rod was drilled straight down from the lighthouse it would emerge into fresh air above the waves.

"I'm not looking forward to the gales coming through this week at all," he says. "We always keep a wary eye on the weather forecast."

Predicting when more of the cliff might peel away is difficult. It has not eroded at a

steady rate but in occasional massive falls.

In 1896, some 80,000 tons of chalk broke off and fell in to the sea. The debris forms a kind of breakwater to be slowly eaten away again.

When Belle Tout was built in 1832, it was 100ft from the cliff edge; by the 1950s the margin was down to 70ft.

The granite building replaced a wooden folly with a working light built by a local MP, "Mad Jack" Fuller, to warn ships plying their way along the Channel away from the great chalk promontory.

But Belle Tout was shrouded in fog so frequently that Trinity House - the body responsible for Britain's network of lighthouses - decommissioned it in 1902, preferring instead a lighthouse at the base

of the cliffs - the photogenic Beachy Head light.

During the Second World War, Belle Tout was used for "friendly fire" target practice and since then it has had a succession of tenants including an architect, a novelist and the BBC, all attracted to its dramatic location. The BBC used it as the setting for its 1980s dramatisation of Fay Weldon's *Life and Loves of a She Devil*.

"At the moment it looks like a toilet block in the middle of nowhere," observed Mr Roberts, who plans to replace the 1950s brick of the upper storey of the cottage with cladding of granite to match the original stone.

But the restoration will not be on the present suspect site. The Roberts have formed a charity - The South Downs

Lighthouse Trust - to raise money physically to move Belle Tout out of danger. It will then be open to the public as a museum.

Plans for the move are due

to be considered by Eastbourne Council, the concerned landlord. Contractors will dig beneath the whole building, raise it two feet in the air, lower it on to "greased skates" and then

with hydraulic rams slide it 70 feet inland to new foundations on an old croquet lawn. If all goes well, the "graceful" journey will take six hours.

The technology exists but the

operation will cost in the order of £250,000. Mr Roberts said the Trust would stay in being to preserve maritime history and, one day perhaps, to move Belle Tout to safer ground again.

## SIEMENS

Remember, somewhere out there is a pair of argyll socks with your name on them.

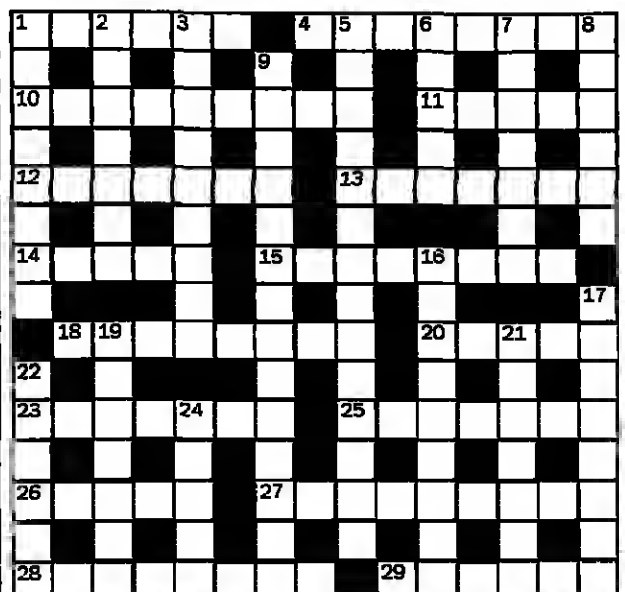


This Christmas, get to Santa before he gets to you. Ask for the new Siemens S10, which has just been voted the Best Business Mobile in the World by Connect magazine and which comes with 10 hours talktime, the world's first colour display and a voice memo function. Better quality, better clarity, better features, better phones. Better Talkology from Siemens. Summarising 0345 400 700 for more information.

## THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3482, Monday 15 December

By Porcia



- ACROSS**
- Gradually learn sense (4,2)
  - Certainly concerned with regular progress (2,6)
  - Overcome hesitation, about Anglican cathedral (9)
  - So far price is a quarter less in Berkshire (5)
  - Great girl but with destructive tendencies? (7)
  - Coat ordered through Roman lady (7)
  - Shakespearean role in radio's Richard III (5)
  - Indication of current recession (8)
  - Commendation is far from rare (4,4)
  - Positive about club getting money from abroad (5)
  - Girl putting physical strain on poet (7)
  - Told gullible person to get help (7)

- Independent article about female criminal (5)
- Prayer for Ruth a European composed (3,6)
- Purveyor of piped music? (8)
- Spot repair badly out of line (6)
- Customers pop in here (8)
- Freebooter's rough manner is pronounced (7)
- Cut in Leach's work is morally wrong (9)
- Supportive of welfare bill in addition (3,4,7)
- Round average time taken to produce abstract painting (2,3)
- Rally about a hundred completed (7)
- Catch points member brought up (6)
- Kate ran too fast and collapsed quickly (2,1,4,2,5)
- Variety show number Henry appears in (5,4)
- Classical scholar's revised chapter about king (8)
- Salary's reduced in paid work (7)
- Craft one is hooked into (7)
- Arrive at hospital located in slum area (6)
- Popular sport seen as a joke (2,3)

Candy Swissair's early bird, bo in Zurich by 9 a.m., shaking

off

kate starters, doing business while they are still suspended. We're also the last to return. Longer business days can mean shorter